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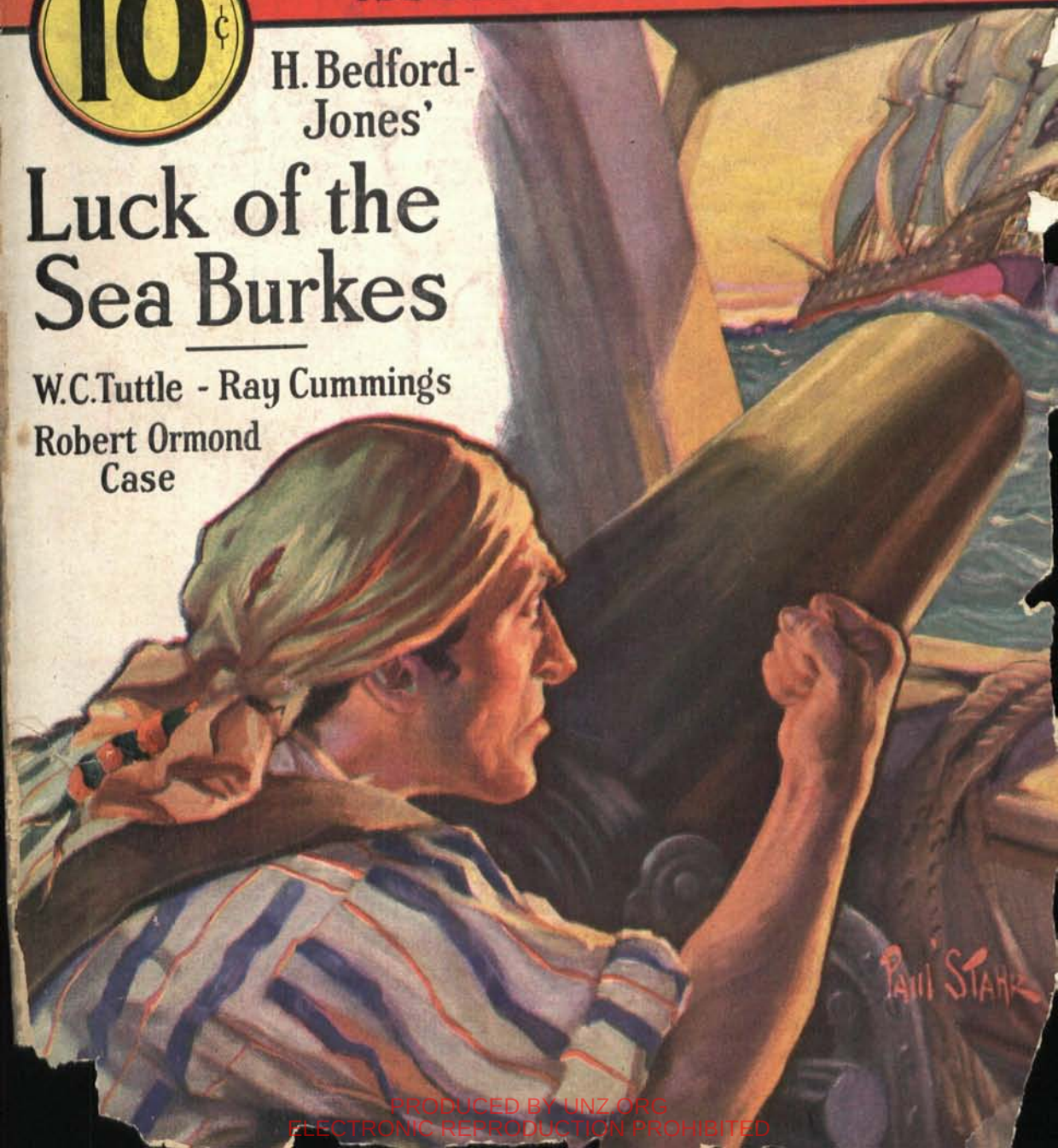
Luck of the Sea Burkes

W.C. Tuttle - Ray Cummings

Robert Ormond Case



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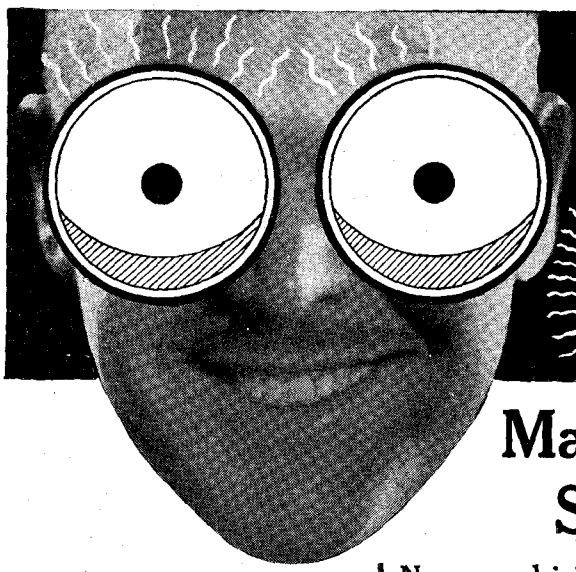
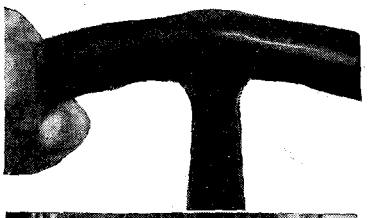
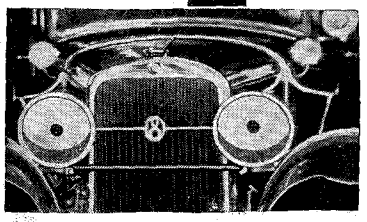


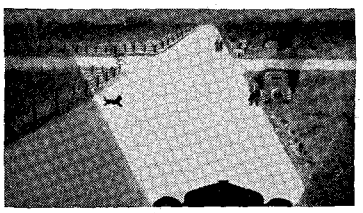
NEW KIND OF AUTO EYES

Makes Night Driving Safer Than Day!

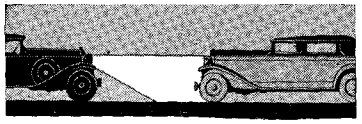




his new kind of Light even LOOKS ntirely different. No wonder every installation brings a dozen more sales.



Lights up entire roadway, including ditches at side. Gives perfect illumination without shadows or flickering.



Banishes Glare Shields, Spot Lights, etc. Floods the road with light, yet absolutely cannot glare.

No more driving "blind" on a crowded highway at night! An astonishing new invention banishes night wrecks and smashups. Ends fear of running over children or animals. Mail coupon quick for the manufacturer's introductory Free Test Offer.

FITS ANY HEADLIGHT—ENDS DANGEROUS DIMMING—DOUBLES ROAD LIGHT!

AT LAST! An amazingly queer yet simple invention lifts the bane and curse of night driving from the motoring world. Actually like magic this altogether new discovery replaces the "bulbs" in automobile headlights with truly amazing results. Road illumination is instantly doubled, yet glare is absolutely banished. Ordinary objects in the road, ruts, animals, obstructions, etc., are made clearly visible at least **three** times as far. Even cuts right through fog, mist, rain and snow. Gives you a solid wall of light 3 feet high, 25 to 50 feet wide. Instead of ordinary "direct" light, this beam is composed entirely of double-reflected or "infused" light. This new kind of beam pours down the highway ahead of you so far that you can actually see to go 70 miles an hour in safety. At a 40 to 50 mile an hour clip, it is positively safer than daylight because all the light is on the road and you see nothing of your surroundings to distract you.

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IT was just a little free book that made the difference between Ed Pinkham and the rest of the men in our shop. Nobody ever imagined that Ed would land, even in the $5,000-a-year class, let alone be making $10,000 before he was thirty. Ed didn't know himself the abilities he had in him as a money-maker.

But one day, a strange occurrence changed his whole life. During his lunch hour Ed started to read a little book he had brought to work with him.

"It's a book called 'The Key To Master Salesmanship,' Bill," he told me. "It's the most amazing thing I ever read. I never dreamed there was so much in salesmanship. You ought to send for a copy yourself. It's free."

"Huh!" said Luke Jones. "Does that book tell you how to become a salesman?"

"It sure does," replied Ed, enthusiastically.

"Don't waste your time," advised Luke. "You can't learn how to be a salesman. A fellow has to be 'born' that way to be a good salesman."

Ed just smiled at that, but he said nothing. Soon afterward he quit the shop, and we forgot about him. And then last night, I met Ed again—driving a snappy new sedan and dressed like a million dollars.

"For Pete's sake," I said. "What are you doing nowadays, Ed?" He smiled. "City sales manager for the Steel Castings Company," he told me. "What are you doing?"

"Still at the shop," I replied. "But what I want to know is, how do you come to be sales manager for Steel Castings? They're one of the biggest firms in the business."

Ed smiled again. "Remember that book on Salesmanship that Luke Jones was kidding me about one day? Well, when I finished my Salesmanship training the Association I took it from gave me a choice of a number of jobs through their Free Employment Department. I got a wonderful job, and I had wonderful training, so I've had a pretty successful time of it. They made me City Sales Manager three months ago at ten thousand dollars a year."

"Good night!" I said. "And Luke and I are still punching the old time clock!"

Ed looked at me seriously. "See here, Bill," he said. "Are you sport enough to risk two cents that you can do as well as I did? Then spend the two cents to write to the National Salesmen's Training Association tonight and get their free book. Then take their course. When you are qualified, their Free Employment Department will help you get a good sales job. Not only will they help you get the job, but they agree under an iron-clad money-back penalty that you must be satisfied with the training received—or they refund your tuition!"

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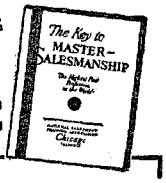

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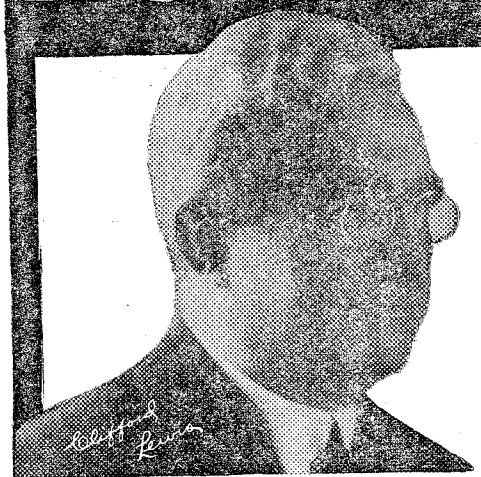

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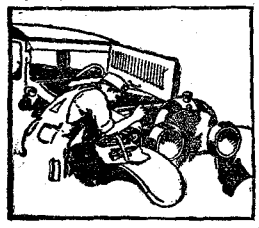

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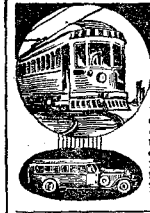

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ARGOSY

VOLUME 226 SATURDAY, JANUARY 9, 1932 NUMBER 5

Expertly the Spaniard crossed rapiers with Burke

Luck of the Sea Burkes

Denis Burke, Irish swordsman and buccaneer, was to find more perils on the rich Spanish Main than cold steel and cannons

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Escape!" "Connor Takes Charge," etc.

CHAPTER I.

PLUNDER.

ALL that morning the guns had thundered down the rolling seas upon an empty horizon, while the brisk wind sent the whitecaps dancing and whirling on toward Hispaniola and Cuba. The great Spaniard was in agony on the face of the waters, but she was well armed, as all Spaniards needs must be in this year of 1703, when all Europe was at wild war; and her captain fought her with splendid skill and courage.

The little ten-gun brig that had way-

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laid her, flying a strange green flag, would have gone to the bottom from any of her broadsides, had one ever landed. Her sailing master, a great bearded man, was too wise for that, far too wise to exchange shot for shot with the towering Spaniard; too wise even to board her and have his men shot and piked out of the high mats and netting stretched up above her bulwarks.

To all appearance, the strangely uneven battle was singularly lacking in effect. True, a few shots had smashed into the brig, but no shot at all had marred the carved and gilded decorations of the high Spanish stern and poop. Five guns at a time, the brig reeled and staggered as her broadsides poured into the Spaniard; those guns were loaded not with ball, but with scrap iron and bags of bullets.

Suddenly the result of this strategy became evident. The rigging of the frigate, already much cut about and weakened, was touched in a vital place. The great fore-yard came down with a splintering crash across the forecastle, bringing canvas and tophamper with it. Over the decks were strewn spars and sails, dragging alongside, hindering every movement, bringing down in their wake the after tophamper as well. The frigate fell away; until the mess was cleared up she could not be handled.

"Good!" said Denis Burke, standing beside his bearded skipper at the tiller of the brig. His voice rang down the decks. "Ready, gunners! Full broadsides, rake her decks only!"

"Stand by the braces!" roared Garf O'Malley, his beard blowing in the wind.

The brig came about. Deliberately, while the frigate could bring no gun to bear upon her, she tacked back and forth under the bows of the great ship. Her guns thundered in repeated broadsides. A frightful storm of missiles swept the decks of the Spaniard, striking down her crew and soldiers. Her captain and a few men endeavored to cut away the wreckage, but few of them stood beside the captain after another broadside.

"A brave man, that," said Burke. "What think you, Garf?"

"Take her," said Garf with a nod, and headed straight for the frigate.

The two ships crashed together, but lightly. Grappling irons caught the high bulwark above, and men went up like cats—a hundred and fifty of them, wild Irishmen who followed Denis Burke down the trail of the buccaneers to gold and glory. This was their first prize, this stalwart Spanish ship homeward bound from the New World, and it was likely to prove a rich one.

FIRST over the rail was Burke himself, carefully dressed as though for a court ball, in his hand gleaming the gold hilt of his Toledo rapier. The Spaniards were already running to repel boarders. Burke parried a pike-thrust, and his point drove into the soldier's throat. Then his men were jumping down around him, leaping in with the cold steel while pistols flashed in their faces and pikes lunged to bring them down, and musketeers hastily loaded their cumbrous weapons to hail them with bullets.

So sharp, so brutally ferocious, was the rush of the Irish, that it burst clear through the Spanish ranks. Another minute, and the whole forward deck and waist was a wild confusion of fighting figures. Through them darted Burke; with a score of his men he came to the poop ladders and was up and on the musketeers before their

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loading was done. And there men died fast on the long sloping deck rising to the poop itself and the cabin doors. Not all of them were Spaniards who fell. The captain of the frigate, a tall man with red hair and a handsome breastplate, cut down man after man, drove forward to reach Burke, and the Irishman turned to meet him. Already the ship was taken, for by now the Spaniards were rushing below or crying for quarter.

"Yield!" ordered Burke sharply in Spanish, as he came face to face with the captain. "Your ship's taken. You'll have quarter."

"Devil take you!" shouted the other, and sent in a lunge that all but finished Burke.

Then the blades crossed, and Denis Burke knew he was fighting for his life. Splendid swordsman as he was, with all the training of years of exile that had brought him to the rank of colonel in the Irish Brigade, he had here met one who was close to being a match for him.

In the midst of it all, somebody hurled a belaying pin that struck the frigate's captain behind the ear and stretched him out, senseless. Burke was glad enough of this. He had the measure of his opponent, and would have killed the man in another moment or two. Now he could afford to spare him.

"Bind him and all the other prisoners," he directed. "Bose! Take charge of the decks. To me, Malachi!"

"Coming, your honor."

Old Malachi Halloran, who had been Burke's soldier servant for years past, came up the deck sheathing a red sword, and saluted. Burke turned to the closed doors of the cabin. They were closed from inside, close fastened. Catching up a musket, Malachi beat on the port door with the butt.

"Open!" commanded Burke in Spanish. "Open, and you shall have quarter, good treatment, safety. Refuse, and we burst down the doors."

"*Señor!*" came the response. "Do you swear to give quarter?"

"No prisoner shall be harmed or molested," returned Burke.

A glance showed him that Garf O'Malley had cast off and was holding the brig a little away from the frigate, because of the rolling seas. Burke had been very anxious not to do this splendid ship any harm, having need of her intact.

The door before him was opened and a monk appeared. Burke saluted him, with a cheerful smile into the stern eyes.

"We don't war on priests, women or helpless folk," he said reassuringly. "Bid them all outside here."

Numbers of his men had gathered to watch, but seeing that they were obviously well under Burke's control, the monk called to those inside the cabins. These ventured out into the sunlight and blowing wind, looking down the bloody decks, gazing with terrified eyes at Burke. There were half a dozen women, numbers of monks, several officials, and a number of servants or slaves, black and white.

Burke turned and spoke to one of his own men.

"Signal O'Malley to come aboard here."

One of the slaves broke forth and came running, and caught at his arm—a stooped, gaunt man with shrewd eyes.

"English, master?" he cried out eagerly. "Set me free, then—say I'm free, master!"

Burke laughed. "Aye, you're free, and those with you. Who are you?"

"Cotton by name, sir; Jeremiah Cot-

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ton o' Bristol, ship's master. A slave I've been wi' the dons these four years and more. Filibusters, are ye? I'll join! A cutlass—give me a cutlass! By the gods, I'm going to let some o' this damned Spanish blood!"

In wild jubilation he went running to where a fallen cutlass lay, and would have flung himself murderously at the priests and women, but Burke stepped in front of him.

"Stop," said he.

"Out o' my way!" yelled Cotton. "Sink me if I don't—"

Burke made a sign. Two of his men, who had stood ready, seized Cotton, and as he fought against them, one struck him senseless.

"Take him away and tie him up until he learns obedience," said Burke.

This they did, and Master Cotton learned obedience. More came of this matter, later on.

THE slaves were freed, and in chains below were found a dozen filibusters, prisoners being sent to Spain for torture and execution. These were mostly French, and by the time they had also learned something of their new leader, big Garf O'Malley had brought up the brig again and was aboard, striding aft.

He was less astonished than were the filibusters at what he found. Many of Burke's men were soldiers out of the Irish Brigade, who had come from France with him, and others were from Galway, where he had halted to recruit his crew. They obeyed him promptly, with no more leaning to license or liquor than if they had been men of the royal navy; and this, for buccaneers, was a new and strange thing.

Certain of them were caring for the wounded and disposing of the dead, others were repairing the shot rigging and getting up the bullet-torn canvas; the ship was being put into shape, with no plundering or disorder, while the prisoners in the waist and the staring group aft stood watching in astonished wonder.

Burke turned to O'Malley.

"What say you, Garf?" he demanded. "Here's a good ship, well found, able to fight anything that sails. She's undamaged, provisioned for Europe. We've a little brig yonder that must run from any king's corvette that pokes her nose over the horizon, with precious little provision and water remaining—but enough to take these dons into Santo Domingo."

"Rough" O'Malley, as his nickname was translated, met the dancing eyes of Burke, and his teeth showed as he grinned in comprehension.

"Why not?" he rejoined. "You'd sacrifice speed for strength, that's all. Best be sure of the strength before we go farther. Shall I take a look?"

"Aye," said Burke. "Go over the ship and guns, and I'll abide by your decision."

This, to tell the truth, had been in his mind from the first; this was why he had done the frigate no damage. If she were as good a ship as she seemed, then he might well sacrifice speed, and a good bargain!

Now he turned to the captives and bowed to them very grandly.

"*Señores,*" he said in Spanish, "you will be sent away unharmed. Your personal belongings are yours to take with you. Get them, you and your servants, such as wish to go with you. The slaves are freed. Only what you wish to take from your cabins, mind! Get it all, bring it out here on deck. Forward there, bose! Bring me the Spanish captain."

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While the delighted captives scattered into the cabins again, with numbers of servants who remained with them, the red-haired captain was led up to where Burke stood.

A bold-eyed man he was, hard of feature, heavy of jaw, wide of shoulder.

"Your name?" asked Burke.

The other grinned at him wolfishly. "Aguilar. Don Sancho de Aguilar, my buccaneer."

"You fought your ship well, *señor* don."

"She was not mine to fight. Our captain was slain at your first discharge. I am a soldier, and took charge. Will you grant me a service, Señor Buccaneer?"

"What is it?" asked Burke, thinking the other meant to challenge him to a duel.

"Keep me with you," and Aguilar lowered his voice, with a glance around. A savage flash showed in his dark violet eyes. "I'll explain to you later, *señor*. Keep me with you, presumably as a prisoner. I'll show you where there's a fortune, a fabulous treasure, that you can get with a bit of fighting!"

"So!" Burke surveyed the man keenly. "And your motive?"

"Revenge, *señor*—revenge, and the most beautiful woman in the world for myself! For you, the gold!"

With his customary swift decision, Burke nodded.

"Good. I'll send you into the cabins yonder under guard."

He sent the two men who had brought Aguilar, telling them to keep him bound and to remain with him in the main cabin.

He turned, to find Garf O'Malley striding up.

"The finest of guns, Denis!" exclaimed the seaman eagerly. "And a good sound ship, not long careened and scraped."

"Then get out collision mats aboard the brig and lay her alongside," said Burke. "Get all our own stuff out of her, and change flags. I'll see to things aboard here."

FOR the next half hour he was a busy man indeed. The Indian ex-slaves, the French filibusters, and some of the Spanish themselves, were not loath to join him. He ordered them to one side for later decision, found that a master's mate of the frigate had survived, and gave him charge of the brig. In no long while, his own men had all their stuff out of her, with most of the powder, and the Spaniards were going aboard. As he passed Burke, the lean, dark friar halted.

"*Señor,* the Conde de Aguilar is not dead?"

"A count, is he?" Burke chuckled whimsically. "No, he is a prisoner for ransom."

The monk's face darkened.

"You'll get little ransom out of him. Do you know that he has been disgraced and was being sent back to Spain in this ship for trial by the king?"

"Then tell the king how he redeemed himself by fighting us," said Burke. "What sort of disgrace came upon him?"

"He was vice-governor of Santo Domingo, *señor,*" was the response. "He was accused of taking bribes. His plantation and goods were confiscated, so your ransom—"

"Will be my affair," said Burke, and watched the friar depart.

Presently all was done. O'Malley gave the master's mate a course for Santo Domingo and the brig filled and

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stood away with her wounded and living cargo. Burke left his men at their job of repairing the running rigging, and strode into the main cabin. Here he found O'Malley and old Malachi Halloran, who had served him in many a campaign, going over the ship's papers.

"Sit ye down and sample this wine, Denis," said Garf O'Malley. "She has a rich cargo. Cocoa and sugar from the islands, with a shipment of silver and some boxes of gold bars for the royal treasury, besides emeralds, gold plate and other trinkets. A health to her!"

"Not bad for our first capture," and Burke laughed. Then he looked at the others, and his blue eyes became keen. "Listen to me, now! Well you know that with the brig we were safe in no French port. We took her out of St. Malo under the noses of the king's men, and all France wants to hang Denis Burke, late lieutenant-colonel of the Irish Brigade. The English want to hang him as an Irish Jacobite. Now the brig's gone, and Denis Burke's gone with her."

"Eh?" Garf O'Malley stared at him. "What mean ye?"

"This." Burke quaffed the wine and leaned back. "We'll never see County Mayo and County Galway again; Ireland's back of us forever, and the sea horizon lies ahead. Well, then! From this day on, I become Captain Mayo, d'ye understand? Pass the word among our own men. Let this name be the one given to the Frenchmen aboard here. I'll not disgrace the name of Burke by having it applied to a buccaneer."

"Faith, it's not a bad notion at all," said Garf delightedly. He clapped down his silver goblet, and the metal flattened out under his hand. "The devil! I forgot myself. Right you are, cap'n! Here's a health to Cap'n Mayo, and the foul fiend take all who gainsay him! It will pass for a Spanish name, likewise."

"Exactly," said Burke. "It's in my mind, Garf, to head up for Le Cap. Ye know, Cape François, which is usually shortened to Le Cap, is a resort of all good buccaneers. It is at the north end of Hispaniola and close to Tortuga, and we'll have a quick market there for our cargo. Then, with the ship lightened and in ballast, with a change of rig here and there, we'll be ready for business."

"And the men will have some fun spending their money, eh?" O'Malley nodded. "What label will ye clap on our new ship? We must get rid of this Spanish name of Madre de Dios."

"No, leave it for this cruise at least —we may have need of it." And Burke told about Aguilar, and what the friar had said. "What think ye, Garf? Shall we talk with him now?"

"No better time," said O'Malley. "They'll not have the rigging in shape for another hour. Malachi, go you and take charge of the deck. Serve out rum all around, pass the word to our men that Denis Burke is dead and gone, God rest him, and that our cap'n is named Cap'n Mayo. And have that Spaniard fetched in here."

SO Aguilar was brought in, relieved of his bonds, and the men dismissed. Burke found some clay pipes and excellent tobacco, and made himself comfortable. He calculated that his captive was not above twenty-five.

"So," he said, as Aguilar drank down some of the good wine, "you're a count, eh? And a bit red for a Spaniard."

"So?" The other grinned. "The

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best Spanish blood is fair, *señores*. It is that of the Goths, the 'old Christians' as they are called."

"True, but I never heard it was red like yours," said O'Malley. "If I had my own say in the matter, I'd put you down for a red O'Donnell, no less."

Aguilar broke into laughter. "Shane O'Donnell," he said in Irish, "and it's a true word yourself has said, Garf O'Malley! Shane O'Donnell, out of the old family, and now Conde de Aguilar. Here's luck to you!"

Big Garf swore in his beard, and Burke's blue eyes narrowed a trifle.

He knew, of course, that since the flight of the Earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnal in 1620 many O'Donnells and others had won name and fame in Spanish armies. He was by no means sure about this Aguilar, however. Whether the man meant them good or ill, was a question.

"Let's have it out, then," said he bluntly. "You've told me there was a yarn of gold and a woman. I've heard there was more to it; that you're accused of taking bribes and were being sent to Spain in this ship."

"True for you," said Aguilar coolly. "With whom am I speaking?"

"With Captain Mayo, the buccaneer," said Burke. "And this is my lieutenant and friend, Garf O'Malley."

"Right. If I heard your men talking of you by another name, then I'll forget it," and the other's eyes twinkled at him. "I was vice-governor of Hispaniola, then. Some of these plaguey royal officials conspired against me, brought false charges, had me arrested while I was down with the fever a month ago. The governor was, of course, sharing in the dirty work, and chief of the rascals was Don Jaime Salcedo—may I meet him soon again! He seized my castle and plantation, fifty miles down the coast from Santo Domingo, as his part of the spoils.

"We left Santo Domingo three days ago, and on the day we left, came word that one of the Plate fleet had put in at my castle, above a little bay, for repairs. Six hours out, a short and sharp hurricane separated us from the fleet and we were trying to pick up the other ships again when we sighted you. There's the story."

"Brief and to the point," approved Burke. "And this ship that put in at your castle—she has the gold you spoke of?"

Aguilar nodded. "Plenty of it. Don Salcedo has the castle, also, and his niece is with him. The woman I spoke of. You have this ship, plenty of men, my help and advice. If you're minded to run down there direct, we may all obtain what we most desire."

"There may be other ships there, sent to her help from Santo Domingo."

"Not ships of war, at least. A ship would probably go down with carpenters and other workmen, or they might go overland."

"H'm! And the woman's in love with you?"

Aguilar smiled, and his sharp, white teeth showed.

"If she isn't, she should be. Leave her to me."

"Very good," said Burke. "Then leave us to talk it over, by your leave. Either you'll go in with us fully, or not at all."

"And you with me, on the same terms," said Aguilar, as he rose, and he laughed as he looked at them. "Until soon, *señores!*"

When the cabin door had closed behind him, Burke looked at the frowning O'Malley.

"Well, Garf? What d'ye say to it? We'd have to go there straight off, car-

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ry through the business, and then head for Le Cap. We've got treasure enough as it lies."

O'Malley nodded. "We've got gold enough, if it's gold we're after, Denis. And yon man is a rascal if I ever saw one—but he's no fool. Better a devil than a fool any day, as my old mother used to say. If it's gold you're after, I'd say no. But—"

Denis Burke broke into a laugh and clapped the seaman on the shoulder.

"But! We think alike, old friend. There's more to this than appears on the surface, eh? Then let's gobble up the bait and see what the luck of the sea Burkes holds for us, eh? Aguilar is a bold rascal, but we'll be bolder. Agreed?"

"Aye," said O'Malley, as he met the reckless, dancing eyes of Burke. "But remember, your luck lies in the sea, not ashore!"

"And sink me if I forget it," said Burke.

So was taken the mad decision, and an hour later the canvas of the Madre de Dios went bellying up, and her head was turned south for Hispaniola, and Aguilar wore his sword again.

CHAPTER II.

IN DISGUISE.

THE castle of San Isidro was no more than a stone-walled fortalice large enough to contain four long brass cannon. Its huge value lay altogether in its location, on a knob of rock fifty feet high.

Upon one side of this knob lay a small but perfectly sheltered harbor, into which a tiny river discharged. The knob was directly above the river mouth, forming, indeed, one side of this mouth. Opposite, across the river and around to the other side of the knob, was all lower ground—rich plantation land, green with waving cane for a huge distance. Opposite the knob, too, and across the river mouth, was the long, comfortable, spacious plantation house, with its slave barracoons behind.

A soldier's eye had seized on this spot. The castle on the rocky knob, whose sides were steep and scaled by a difficult road, impossible even for mules, completely commanded the little harbor. It commanded, with equal completeness, the plantation house opposite and all the lower ground around. In older days this had been a favorite watering place for brethren of the coast and other gentry who dared not enter Santo Domingo, but the guns on the knob had changed all that long ago. Those four long brass cannon could spew forth bags of bullets or heavy shot with impunity, for no ship's guns could be elevated sufficiently to be brought to bear on the crest.

San Isidro, situated at the eastern end of the island, was isolated. San Domingo was fifty miles to the west, Samana far to the north. Mountains cut it off from the interior. Here one might well be a petty king, ruler of all he surveyed.

Aguilar piloted them truly and well. In the three days that elapsed ere they raised the coast, Burke had studied the man. He judged him to be unscrupulous, cruel, a splendid campaigner, a typical soldier of fortune, a man who would betray every one around him to serve his own ends. Burke was by no means blind in this affair.

They sailed into the little harbor to find two small coasters lying there, come from Santo Domingo, and half-careened on the white beach under the knob was a demi-galleon—a huge, un-

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wieldy craft. Aguilar had warned them that the Madre de Dios, which had come from Mexico and had lain for three weeks at Santo Domingo, would be known to Salcedo and others here; so they sailed in with Spanish colors flying, and with every man aboard dressed in the Spanish garb provided abundantly from the effects of the departed ship's company. Aguilar remained out of sight.

Burke, who spoke Spanish perfectly, picked out half a dozen of the French filibusters who could also handle the language, and lowered a boat. He could count implicitly on these men. Reckless to a degree, delighting in the part they were playing, knowing no law save the will of their commander, these filibusters were a welcome addition to his complement of men. As they had no share in the plunder of the frigate, but would share in any takings here, they were more than eager to serve in the venture.

There was a low wharf here, with sheds beyond, on the side of the river opposite the knob. As he was rowed in to meet the throng coming down to the wharfs, Burke noted the glitter of helmets at the little fortress and the camp of men up the river bank—all obviously from the galleon, which would carry both soldiers and seamen.

Burke, who was by no means indifferent to costume, had come upon the chest of some grandee with huge delight.

At his side was his own gold-hilted Toledo; his deep-blue Genoa velvet, pricked out with cloth of gold, his heavy lace at throat and cuffs, his crimson Cordovan hip-boots, the star of St. Jago on his breast, the huge emerald rings on his hand, the wide hat with a superb plume, all became him well, lent his keen aquiline features a touch of splendor and created a magnificent setting for his air of distinction.

AS he bowed to the assembled noblemen, Burke's spirits rose to his usual high audacity when confronting the unknown. This group of half a dozen men was composed of officers and grandees; in the center was a man of fifty, handsomely dressed, with a gray-brown beard and close-set, furtive eyes that oddly belied his grand air.

This, as Burke guessed, was Don Salcedo.

"Gentlemen, a very good morning to you!" said Burke cheerfully. "I am Don Agusto Mayo y Cabello, in command of a f r i g a t e just arrived at Santo Domingo from Cadiz. As my ship was badly battered by the recent hurricane, and most of the officers of the Madre de Dios were down with fever, I took charge of her and came to this port to see if I might be of service to you."

"*Caballero,* you are welcome, in the name of God!" said the stately don. "I am Don Jaime Salcedo, and these gentlemen are officers of the Santa Trinidad, whom you see here on shore in evil case. You say that Don Diego Gutierrez, the captain of the ship, is ill with fever? That is sad news. He is a very gallant *caballero.* But come, accompany us up to the house; it is entirely yours, with all its contents, and it is ill talking here in the hot sun. You are new come from Spain, Don Agusto?"

"Aye," returned Burke. "And then from some years of captivity among the Moors. I give you my word, *señor,* that when I escaped and arrived safely in Ceuta, I could scarce speak two words of Castilian! However, all goes

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well, and campaigning here in the Indies with a good ship will be better than slaving and starving under a Barbary sun."

"It will be," said one of the officers, "if the accursed buccaneers leave you alone!"

Burke laughed. "How should they bother a great ship, *señor?*"

"The devils run in under our broadsides and board; they are like ravening wolves, half starved or else drunk with rum. Not even the glorious soldiers of Spain can stand before them once they get a foothold on your deck! Our soldiers are seldom accustomed to a ship's deck, and of course our rogues of seamen are not good for fighting. The best chance if you meet a buccaneer is to cripple him with your guns before he gets alongside."

So, talking of one thing and another, they all approached the cool house. These men were most of them long absent from Spain; they demanded news avidly of the homeland, and Burke, nothing loath, provided it. What he did not know, he invented. There was news of the war to give also, and here he was more at home. He noted that Don Salcedo cast frequent glances out at the frigate, and as they drew near to the house, the Spaniard took his arm and spoke familiarly.

"Don Agusto, have you a gentleman aboard who was to be taken to Spain by that ship—one Conde de Aguilar?"

"I think he was taken ashore when the sailing was postponed," said Burke. "I am not heading for Spain now, you comprehend—I was asked by the governor to come up here and see whether we could be of any assistance to you."

The other nodded, satisfied, and bowed him into the house with stately courtesy.

HERE he was conducted to the cool and shady patio, where the wide fronds of huge banana trees fended off the afternoon sun, and a fountain plashed softly among soft green orange trees. The party resumed their interrupted diversions—a lazy enjoyment of tobacco, chilled wine, and the talk which Spaniards loved. All were from the mainland, except Don Salcedo, with tales of gold, of Aztecs and Peruvians, and with privations and fever written on their faces. There had been no women aboard the Santa Trinidad, as it chanced.

Burke, his greeting over, said little and heard much. The galleon, it seemed, had run foul of a reef, considerably damaging her rudder and bottom, but was now nearly repaired. Her nominal captain, Don Balthazar Olivares, appeared supremely uninterested, leaving such matters entirely to his sailing master and seamen. He and his officers had been out that same morning with Don Salcedo, running down some maroons, as the Indians of the interior were called, to increase the labor supply of the plantation. They had brought in a dozen or more, and had killed thrice as many in the savage extermination practiced by the Spaniards. When Burke heard of Indian children cut down, of women tortured, his face went a little white and his eyes lost their warmly whimsical glow and became like chilled steel.

The maroons, he gathered, were not unmixed with blacks, many of whom had escaped from the plantations to the inaccessible portions of the mountains. At times they were hunted down in numbers and kept in a state of subjection, for outlying plantations such as

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this were always in danger from their raids.

The two small coasters had been sent from Santo Domingo with carpenters and artisans to work on the galleon. The latter's complement of two hundred soldiers was in the camp up the creek, with the exception of a few guards. Her guns, stores, and much of her cargo had perforce been landed; she would not be ready to take to sea again for a week at least, thanks to this necessary reloading, and Don Balthazar was already vastly bored with San Isidro. And fever threatened him.

"Perhaps," suggested Burke suavely, "you and your friends, *señor* don, would all come out to dinner aboard the Madre de Dios? Let us say, at sunset. The sea is calm, we can put out to sea for a few miles and obtain a cool breeze, and I have some excellent wine aboard. Perhaps Don Salcedo can provide us with a few cattle and some fresh fruit—unfortunately I neglected these matters at leaving Santo Domingo."

The suggestion was welcomed with great acclaim. Every one sat up straighter, and jaded eyes became bright again. Don Salcedo not only accepted the invitation to join the party, but promised to send aboard fresh meat and fruits within an hour's time.

Then came the one thing Burke was burning to discover, as one of the officers addressed Don Balthazar.

"Think you it will be safe for us all to leave, *señor* don? You know, the gold was fetched ashore here—"

"Nombre de Dios!" ejaculated the haughty Spaniard. "Who is going to steal it, then? I'll set a dozen men on guard here about the house, and Sergeant Ruiz will be an excellent man to leave in command of the place. Do you fear the maroons will attack, then?"

There was a burst of laughter, and under cover of this, Burke withdrew. Don Salcedo accompanied him down to the wharf and saw him off with much stately Spanish courtesy. As he was rowed out to his ship, Burke questioned the French filibusters at the oars.

"What of these maroons? Is there any way one can reach them?"

"But yes, *m'sieu!*" came the quick response. "Those slaves we freed, the Indians! We have but to land them anywhere on the coast, and they can reach their people swiftly."

"With a message?"

The stroke oar grinned at him. "They know the filibusters, *mon capitaine!* We work with them often. If you want to bring down the maroons on these Spaniards, we can talk with the Indians in their own tongue and arrange everything."

Burke nodded, well satisfied at this. "Very well. Talk with them. If I set them ashore somewhere near by, before sunset, see whether they can bring down the maroons to attack the camp yonder at dawn."

He went up the side of the frigate, whose decks were carefully staged for benefit of those ashore with men in morion and breastplate, and clapped O'Malley on the shoulder.

"On to the cabin, Garf! All's well. Malachi! Come you and listen."

In the handsome main cabin they found Aguilar, eagerly awaiting them. Burke dropped on a seat and laughed.

"They're coming aboard at sunset or after—all the officers, and Don Salcedo! We're giving a grand dinner, and are putting out to sea for the cool evening breeze. Don Salcedo is even sending oxen aboard and fresh fruit, for the feast!"

He described his visit ashore. Aguilar broke in swiftly.

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"And Doña Inez? You met her? You gave her the message?"

"Eh?" Burke stared at him, then chuckled whimsically. "Faith, I forgot all about her! No, I didn't see her. But I'm sending out men to fish, in a boat. We must put the Indians in her, covered over with a tarpaulin—here, I'll tell you the plan."

He spoke rapidly, eagerly, and Garf O'Malley listened with kindling eyes, but Aguilar scowled, and a bitter twist curved his lips, and the look he fastened upon Burke was keen and dark with unuttered thoughts.

Nor did Burke miss the look, though he appeared to take no heed.

CHAPTER III.

SPANISH "GUESTS."

SUNSET was approaching when boats put out and the guests began to come aboard.

Burke had gleefully worked getting the frigate in readiness. The Indians were gone long since, and the boat had returned after landing them a couple of miles up the coast. A file of supposedly Spanish soldiers stood on the deck; the frigate was redolent with the odors of cooking meat; Burke and O'Malley stood by to receive their visitors; the after mess cabin was laid out with all the silver and gold plate found aboard—an entire service of it, made in Mexico for the King of Spain.

Don Salcedo and Don Balthazar came aboard, the former thin-visaged, furtive of eye; the latter haughty and listless. After them came the officers of the galleon, the lean, hard, fever-bitten veterans of Mexico and South America. When they were all over the rail, the bo's'n's whistle blew, the anchor came heavily up, and the top-sails were shaken out. The stately frigate gathered way, passed the two little coasters, and headed out to sea.

The Spaniards thought it very singular that Burke had no officers here aboard; but in truth only the French filibusters had any great smattering of Spanish, and none of these could pass for a Spanish *caballero*. Burke laughed and laid it to the fever which had stricken most of the frigate's complement, and presently led his guests down to the mess cabin. The ports were all open wide, the sea was smooth, and the grateful coolness of the evening delighted them all. Lanterns and candelabra were lighted, and amid no little laughter and merriment the wine was poured, and Burke ordered Malachi to serve the dinner.

One place, at the foot of the table near the door, remained empty.

The wine was plied, toasts were drunk, the food was brought in and the banquet got well under way. Then Burke, who sat at the head of the table with Don Balthazar on his right and Don Salcedo on his left, made a signal. The supposed servants departed. Unostentatiously, others slipped into the long cabin—men half naked, kerchiefs about their heads, steel at their waists, a pistol in each hand. And, coming to the chair at the foot of the table and bowing ceremoniously, was Conde de Aguilar.

There was a moment of stupefied, incredulous silence, while Don Salcedo sat with a terrible pallor creeping over his face. Then Burke rose and lifted his silver goblet.

"*SEÑORES!*" he exclaimed upon the silence. "The comedy is played out, and now the drama begins; allow me to acquaint you with the facts of the case. I must intro-

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duce to you the Conde de Aguilar, whom some of you already know. He is my guest aboard this ship. I am Captain Mayo the buccaneer, and I captured this ship some days ago. *Señores,* you are all my prisoners, and if one man of you draws a weapon or leaves his chair, my men have orders to shoot. See to it!"

They sat in paralyzed silence, until a breath passed among them; the name of Aguilar. He caught it, and a thin smile touched his lips as he sipped his wine, looking from man to man.

"What, *caballeros,* no greeting for me?" he said derisively. "And you, honest Don Salcedo, no word for your old friend? Ah, yes, I forgot. You accused me of taking bribes, eh? You had me placed under arrest, all my property confiscated. Well, I am going to hang you in five minutes, so make your last prayer."

Don Salcedo pulled himself together.

"Aguilar," he said slowly, a level bitterness in his voice, "you are a scoundrel. Now I perceive this is no jest, but sober earnest. So you have become a traitor, a thorough rascal, combining with outlaws of the sea against your own countrymen?"

"*Señor* don," put in Burke, who did not intend to let Aguilar assert too much authority, "let us do him justice.

"He, and he alone, fought us, made us pay dear for the ship. When all was lost, when he had been struck down and captured—then he said a word to me, and joined me."

"None the less, he is a scoundrel," said Don Salcedo.

"And now you hang!" cried out Aguilar fiercely, and gestured to the men around. "Take out that old man and hang him! Quickly!"

None of them made the slightest move to obey.

A furious oath broke from Aguilar, until he saw Burke's quiet smile and realized the truth.

"Oh! They need the order from you, do they? Give it quickly, my friend!"

"Not at all," said Burke in Spanish, that all might understand. "*Señores,* I regret to say that the wishes of my friend Aguilar cannot be entirely complied with. It desolates me to remind him that I am master here, and you gentlemen are my guests, not his; my prisoners, not his. I do not betray my hospitality—beyond certain limits. As Spaniards, you are prisoners. As *caballeros* and soldiers, you are my guests. No harm shall come to you, no ransom shall be demanded; you'll be set at liberty when I've taken what I wish from your ship's cargo—"

Aguilar leaped to his feet, snarling a wild oath.

"Are you a traitor to your given word?" he demanded hotly. "You bargained with me for everything!"

"Not at all!" and Burke laughed a little. "For gold and a woman, remember. Nothing was said about the murder of a helpless man."

"Well, then, I'll bargain with you now!" flamed out Aguilar savagely at Burke. "I have gold of my own hidden in that house ashore. Plenty of it, enough to make any one rich for life, do you understand? You shall have a full half of it; but I want to see this goat-bearded rascal hung at the yard of this ship!"

Burke smiled whimsically down the long table, and only the icy glint in his eyes gave any hint of his hidden anger. Every one remained silent; the tense interest had been switched to these two men facing each other, and the Span-

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iards had for the moment forgotten their own plight in watching and listening.

"I see plainly," said Burke in a gentle voice, "that you are not accustomed to dealing with Irish gentlemen, my friend. I do not sell the blood of any man for gold. If you have a quarrel with this *caballero,* that is not my affair. Don Salcedo, you will pardon my discourtesy in neglecting to set the matter before you. Do you desire that I should turn you over to Conde de Aguilar, or do you prefer to remain as my guest?"

"Eh? Eh?" Don Salcedo blinked. "Why, *señor,* as—as your guest, of course!"

"Then the matter is closed," said Burke, with a wave of his hand.

"It is not closed!" cried out Aguilar fiercely. "I mean to have this man hung!"

"Either it is closed one way, or another if you prefer," said Burke. "If you are not content, my friend, my men will take you out and hang you. Choose, here and now."

Aguilar stared at him, and saw that Burke meant his words, as indeed he did. With an effort Aguilar dismissed the matter entirely and sank back into his chair.

"Very well, *señor,*" he said. "I withdraw my demand."

"That is very wise of you," rejoined Burke, smiling slightly, and rose. "If you will now join me on deck, I should like to discuss plans with you.

"*Señores,*" and he glanced around smilingly at the dismayed, stupefied faces, "pray continue your meal. There is no haste, as you must remain confined to this cabin until daylight, possibly longer. Accept the situation with grace, I beg of you, for otherwise you will certainly be killed. I shall rejoin you presently."

WITH a bow he passed down the length of the table, took Aguilar by the arm, and led him out to the ladder. When they had gained the deck, the other stopped short.

"*Señor,*" he said, his voice vibrant with repressed passion, "by the saints, tell me whether you spoke in jest or earnest down there!"

"Entirely in earnest," said Burke coolly, as Garf O'Malley strode up to them and halted. "No harm shall come to any of those men, unless they try to escape, which is unlikely. For the love of the saints to whom you appeal, can you not realize that I am a gentleman?"

"I thought you were a buccaneer," sneered Aguilar.

"One can be the other, my friend. All well, Garf?"

"All well," responded the bearded seaman.

"Good; let us discuss plans. Aguilar, it appears, has a large sum of gold hidden at his house ashore. He'll want to get that; it belongs to him, and he should have it. Also, he shares as we agreed in the loot of the galleon. We can't be sure that those Indians will get the maroons down upon the place by dawn, so we'd better make our own plans. First, that rocky knob holding the cannon. We'll have to seize it."

"You and I can do that," spoke up Aguilar, with an air of sneering challenge. "The two of us won't arouse any suspicion. We can take care of the sentry at the little gate, and hold it open until your men can rush up from below."

"Agreed," said Burke promptly. "Then turn the guns on the camp and

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hold it quiet, eh? If the maroons don't show up, we'll be playing safe that way. Garf, send us ashore with a dozen men in one boat—our best gunners. Once we're landed, you tumble out every one ashore. A score of men can seize the galleon. You lead the rest to the house and make sure of it, for the gold is there. Better send Malachi with me. All this, half an hour before daybreak. With dawn, we'll get off our hatches and load aboard the best of the galleon's cargo, with the gold from the house. We haven't room for much, so take only the best. Understood?"

"Right," said O'Malley. "By the way, that English shipmaster has been asking for you. He wants to speak with you."

LEAVING Aguilar to his own devices, Burke accompanied his lieutenant into the waist, where they came on Jeremiah Cotton, smoking a clay pipe and leaning on the bulwark. The frigate was floating calmly, her canvas furled, some three miles offshore.

"Well, Cotton?" said Burke, as O'Malley passed on. "You wanted speech with me?"

"Aye, master," and the other turned to him. "I be main sorry, cap'n, for what I said and did the day of our meeting."

Burke clapped him on the back.

"Nonsense, man! Say no more about it. The leap from slavery into freedom is enough to unsettle any man's wits. If you want to join us when we reach Le Cap, say the word and we may arrange an officer's place for you aboard."

"Thank'ee, sir," returned Cotton. "But there was summat else I had in mind to say, cap'n. About this Don Aguilar, it is. I heard a mortal lot o' talk about him since we took him aboard at Santo Domingo, and he bain't what one might call an honest gentleman, cap'n. He's a proper devil in a fight, but a main bad 'un at all times."

"Thanks, Cotton," said Burke quietly. "Never fear, I have his measure."

"Very good, cap'n. And if so be as there was a reward give me, I could show you where some o' them women aboard hid some jewels, sir. I heard 'em speak of it as they was put aboard the brig. You see, cap'n, they didn't trust you; they thought as how you meant for 'em to get out all their personal belongings, and then rob 'em to the skin."

"So?" Burke chuckled. "They've repented, then, ere this! Right. If you know where any loot is hidden, let's look it up. You'll get a third of it. Agreed?"

"Aye, cap'n!" Eagerness filled the gaunt man's voice. "It's in the larboard side after cabin, the one Cap'n O'Malley has taken for himself!"

"Get a lantern, then, and come along," said Burke. He looked around for O'Malley, but the latter had gathered the men in the forward waist and was telling them the plans for the landing, so Burke forbore to bother him at the moment.

Cotton obtained a lantern, pinched the wick of the candle to make it burn brighter, and joined Burke on the quarter-deck. They passed into the poop cabins, and so came to that which O'Malley had taken—a large cabin lighted by one of the huge stern windows and highly ornamented with carved and gilded work.

Holding up the lantern, Cotton pointed to a framed saint's picture built into the wall at one side.

"There y'are, sir—behind that pic-

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ture there's a secret place hidden. I don't know the workings of it, but—"

Burke went to the picture, tapped it and the frame, looked in vain for any means of discovering the secret place behind it.

"If you'll take the light, cap'n," said Cotton, hauling out his knife. "I'll cut the picture out o' the frame and we'll be at it that way."

Unsuspecting, Burke took the lantern. The gaunt man leaned forward and drew his knife about inside the frame, slitting through the heavy canvas of the picture. He jerked the canvas square away and thrust his face into the opening.

"It's there, cap'n, it's there!" came his muffled voice. "I can see the jewels shining and glittering, a whole heap of 'em!"

"Well, get away and give some one else a chance!" exclaimed Burke, amused by the man's eagerness. He came closer, holding up the lantern. "Here—"

Cotton drew back sharply, caromed into him, knocked against the lantern and plunged the cabin into darkness.

SOME sixth sense warned Burke, just as the awkward by-play happened. Like a flash he threw himself sidewise, falling against the cabin wall. Cotton's arm passed across his chest, the knife driving into the oak, then wrenching loose. A panted oath, and the gaunt man was on top of him, stabbing furiously.

"By the gods, I'll earn the money now!" rose his voice, as his left hand caught Burke's throat and the knife drove in for a finishing blow.

The blow did not land.

Anticipating it as the bony fingers found his throat, Burke fetched up his left arm sharply, deflected the knife, gripped the wrist of Cotton. For a moment the two men struggled furiously in the darkness. Cotton's breath came in hoarse panting surges; he fought like a madman to free his knife arm, was hard to hold as an eel. Then the two came breast to breast, and Burke had the grip he wanted, regardless of Cotton's free hand that flailed him with blows.

Turning swiftly in the darkness, putting out his strength, Burke flung the man bodily over his hip, flung him with a surging lift that picked him up and heaved him through the air. There was a crash, a wild and frantic cry; a moment later, Burke realized he stood alone in the darkness. Cotton had gone plunging out through the thin wooden lattice-work of the stern window, whose stout wooden doors stood ajar to let in air.

By the time Burke reached the deck and gave the alarm, some moments had passed. From the dark sea overside came no voice to answer the hails, nor did the lanterns lowered on ropes show any sign of Cotton. The man was gone, with that one plunge.

But Burke wondered whose money Cotton had been trying to earn, and had no answer to his mental query—none, at least, for the present.

As for jewels behind the picture, there were none. That had been a lie, pure and simple.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ATTACK.

MIDNIGHT was past, as the frigate turned in toward the coast, three or four miles away. A light breeze, barely ruffling the water, was sending her along at rippling speed. Burke, who had been snatching

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an hour or two of sleep, came hastening out on deck in response to the summons that had roused him, and joined O'Malley on the high poop. Two of the French filibusters stood there, also.

"What's up?" asked Burke, yawning. "Ships, you say?"

"Two vessels bearing down on us, Denis," said Garf O'Malley, and pointed. "There they are. Friend Tout-en-Muscles here says they're filibusters."

Burke saw them now, in the clear thin moonlight, for the moon was nearly at full and had come up late. Two small shapes indeed, but coming straight for their prey like wolves at the kill.

"Malachi! Get the bo's'n. Summon all hands, but quietly. No lights, except on the lower gun deck; all ports tight closed. Load the guns. Stand ready to trice up the ports when I give the word. No noise, no lights, remember!"

Tout-en-Muscles, a burly, knotted Frenchman, plucked at his elbow.

"*M'sieu!* They'll think to catch us napping and lay aboard us. If they know we're buccaneers, they'll not fight. Hail them when they come closer. If English, they'll fight anyway; but they may be French."

"Aye," said Burke. "Stand by to back up my hail. It may be some one you know."

Fast overhauling the heavy-laden, lumbering frigate, the two sea wolves came slipping along, canvas bellied out full, but no lights showing. Burke had long previously established aboard the huge frigate a system of messages, so that within a moment his orders could be sent to every quarter of the vessel; already he heard the stir of wakening men, the tramp of bare feet rising from the lower decks, and from the companionway came the acrid tang of the slow-matches being lighted. A man came up with a speaking-trumpet, and Burke waited at the starboard rail. The larger of the two sea wolves was closing in from that side.

"Cap'n!" exclaimed Tout-en-Muscles, after a brief word with his companion. His voice was excited. "Devil take me if I don't know that craft! It's the ship of Captain Roland, the filibuster! I've sailed with him aboard her. He carries three hundred men at the least, and—"

Burke swung up the long cone to his lips, and sent his voice vibrantly across the moonlit, dancing waters in French.

"Captain Roland! Ahoy, there! Brethren of the coast!"

Then, swiftly, to one of the waiting men:

"Ports up, battle lanterns showing—quickly!"

The order went droning down the decks. A sharp yelp of astonishment came from the buccaneer, then a deep, heavy-throated voice.

"Who calls?"

"A friend," responded Burke. "Captain Mayo, the buccaneer! This is my ship, you comprehend? If you want to attack, you'll have a fight on your hands, Roland!"

"*C'est vrai!*" And Tout-en-Muscles leaped to the bulwark and shouted his name. "Remember me, *mon capitaine?* Here are filibusters French and Irish and English, and all the Spaniards are prisoners. Come alongside and talk, or fight if you so desire!"

Now the ports of the Madre de Dios were triced up, and the long guns run out on their carriages, so that the Frenchmen could see the gunners standing ready by the light of the swinging battle lanterns. The ship they had taken to be an unsuspecting Span-

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iard was abruptly seen to be manned by sea wolves like themselves, fangs bared, ready for a fight.

Quick, sharp orders passed between the two buccaneering vessels, then the larger one sheered in closer, the other stood away.

"*Diable!* We come as friends, in that case," shouted Captain Roland. "Heave to and I'll come alongside."

Burke laughed harshly. "No, no, my friend! You don't catch me so easily as that. Mind your helm and run alongside us, but you're not invited aboard."

The two vessels were close now, almost within biscuit-toss, and looking down on the other ship, Burke saw her captain standing in the shrouds.

"Bah! Don't think I want to dispute your bone," returned Roland. "We're loaded down now with plunder and making for Le Cap. Since you are no Spaniard, but a brother, I welcome you. Captain Mayo, is it? I never heard of such a name."

"You'll hear it often enough in future," and Burke chuckled. "If you're heading for Le Cap, I'll be there myself a few days after you. I'm standing in now to take San Isidro. Come along and join me, and share what we find there!"

"San Isidro? Name of the devil, but that's suicide!" yelped the bearded Roland. "They will blow you out of the water! Stay away from there, my friend."

"Nonsense," replied Burke. "Join your force to mine and we'll take the place easily."

"Name of the devil!" came the answer. "We've plunder enough now, and I'll not jeopardize it by running my head into a trap! If you attack San Isidro, you'll lose your ship and all else, I warn you!"

"Last chance to join me, Roland!" shouted Burke. "There's a galleon ashore there, and gold for the taking!"

"To the devil with her and you too, madman!" cried the other, and leaped down to his own deck. Next moment his ship stood away, and the two sea wolves sheered off to the northward and left the frigate to her own course.

Burke laughed a little, but made no other comment.

AN hour before dawn the frigate was standing in for the San Isidro entrance, half a mile distant. "All hands stand by!" ordered Burke. "Pikes and cutlasses; no muskets. Where's Aguilar?"

"Here, *señor*." Aguilar appeared, wearing helmet and breastplate.

Openly, with lanterns on her deck, the frigate came into the little harbor and resumed her old position. A sharp hail drifted down from the rocky knob, although those in the battery must have recognized her, and Aguilar made response.

A boat was lowered. Presently Burke and Aguilar were going shoreward, with the men selected to assault the battery.

Instead of heading for the wharf, they crossed the estuary toward the rocky knob and landed on the beach below it. Aguilar called up, giving the names of two of Don Balthazar's officers, saying they were mounting for inspection. A listless assent floated down.

The very boldness of it all, the open, unhurried mounting of the two men, gave no cause for alarm to the unsuspecting sentries. They did not see the men below, scattering in the shadow, coming as far along the path as they dared. Other boats were going ashore from the frigate, heading for the

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wharf; voices were floating lazily over the dawn-darkness of the water. The long, cool night was past, another torrid day was at hand. If only those two accursed officers were drunk enough to make a careless inspection and cause no trouble—

"First blow to me," said Aguilar, with a laugh, as he and Burke came to the open gate in the stone wall, at the top of the path. A sentry stood there, musket on shoulder, breastplate glittering faintly in the dim moon of dawn.

Burke fell back. Aguilar, still laughing, drew his rapier, and without a word, without a hint of warning, drove it through the throat of the watching sentry. Burke could scarce repress a savage oath of horror at the black murder. The useless cruelty of it revolted him.

Another sentry, not a dozen paces away, saw the deed, uttered one shrill cry, leveled his musket and put a match to pan. To the roar, Burke heard the ball whistle overhead, and saw Aguilar run in through the smoke. That sentry died as the other had. Then Aguilar was back, with a short, exultant laugh.

The two stood side by side just within the shadow of the gateway. Men came running, an officer waving his sword, shouting at them in angry surprise, too impetuously eager to draw back and use muskets. Eight or ten men followed him in a torrent, not knowing what was going on, their pikes glittering in the wan light.

The officer flung himself at Burke, who coolly engaged his blade for an instant, then lunged. The Spaniard fell; his men poured forward, the two blades striking aside the pike heads, thrusting beneath them.

Men began to cry out and fall. Shouts rose loudly. From the path outside came a scuffling scramble of feet, hoarse panted voices. Burke could not but admire the address and agility of Aguilar in this critical moment, as he fought with weapons darting and licking around him, and death answered his thrusts.

Then a bursting yell, and the men from below poured in, and the rest was slaughter. Burke cornered one of the Spaniards, held him helpless, disarmed him, lowered his blade.

"I give you life, *señor,*" he said rapidly. "Go to the camp yonder. Say that Captain Mayo, the buccaneer, has captured the guns here, the ships, the plantation. If any men leave the camp, these guns will open on them. Otherwise, there will be no attack. Go!"

In fear of his life, the man slipped from the gate and departed hastily toward the camp.

BURKE looked down across the little river. In the gray dawn-light men were streaming up in a dark flood from the wharf and sheds toward the plantation.

A shot rang out, and then another; a wild, shrill yell made answer.

"Taken, my captain!" Tout-en-Muscles appeared, waving a reddened cutlass, before Burke. "Shall we man the guns?"

"Aye," said Burke. "If the Spaniards start to leave their camp, open on them. Otherwise, send one shot over them, then wait. I've sent them word to bide quiet."

The filibuster gathered his men with shouts. Aguilar came to Burke hurriedly.

"Ready, *señor?*" he cried. "All awaits us, yonder!"

"Come, then."

They descended the path together, Aguilar, fired with eagerness to reach

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the plantation, telling of the ford below the camp where they could cross the river easily. Cross it they did, while the daylight grew, and from the great house ahead the noise of conflict died down and ceased. In the Spanish camp drums beat and trumpets shrilled. One of the cannon on the knob thundered out its warning message, and the drums ceased abruptly. There was no movement from the camp.

Aguilar went dashing ahead, and Burke, smiling at the man's impatience, followed more slowly, content to let the daylight grow. A screaming of women reached him, but it died away almost at once, and he perceived that Garf O'Malley was in full control. A cursing soldier, his face all stove in and bloody, went staggering toward the beach to bear witness that Garf's hand was heavy.

As Burke came up to the front of the house, where men were plundering unhindered, he perceived that a detachment was freeing the slaves in the barracoons, while others had seized the beached galleon and the two coasters. All fighting was at an end.

"The place is ours, Denis!" roared O'Malley, emerging from the house. "Orders?"

"Leave a dozen men here with me," said Burke. "Take all hands otherwise, and get the gold aboard, and anything from the galleon's cargo that we might want. Let the men plunder her at will, since there are no women aboard."

"Malachi and six others are on guard over the women's quarters here," said O'Malley. "You'll find 'em inside, across the patio. I'll send six more to join you."

The bo's'n's whistle rang out its summons, as Burke passed on into the house.

His men had turned it into sad wreck and ruin, while here and there the bodies of Spaniards showed that those on guard here had not surrendered tamely. He went on through into the patio; the first spears of sunrise were reddening the eastern sky. Malachi Halloran was on the far side, standing sword in hand. He saluted respectfully as Burke approached.

"All well, your honor. The men are inside, guarding the rooms. Aguilar just went in."

Burke nodded and passed on. He wanted to find where Aguilar's gold was hidden and get it safely aboard for the man. He came into a long passage where a number of his men were lounging, and at the same moment, heard a suppressed scream and a rising sound of angry voices from one of the rooms.

"Aguilar?" he asked, and his men nodded.

Burke advanced to the door, shoved it open, and stood looking at the scene before him.

A NUMBER of candles were burning dimly, struggling against the new daylight. Aguilar stood in the center of the room, bowing mockingly to a girl from whose face and head he had just torn a black lace shawl. She faced him angrily—a girl whose beauty struck Burke all amazed; she was dark and lovely, and her anger had heightened her color. Two older women half crouched at her side, moaning, but there was no fear in her face.

"You misapprehend, Doña Inez," said Aguilar, throwing aside the remnants of the black shawl. "Buccaneers have seized this place; your uncle, the others, are all prisoners. I am here to rescue you."

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"I want none of your rescue," she said disdainfully. "I have no trust in you, for you are a liar and a rogue."

"None the less, you are mine," said Aguilar, "and you go with me, my pretty one."

She looked over his shoulder, and her eyes widened on the figure of Burke. Perhaps the whimsical smile in his eyes, the warm friendliness in that keenly aquiline face of his, reached out to her. A new light came into her eyes, and she drew herself up straighter.

"How now, *señor?*" said Burke quietly. "Perhaps there is some mistake here."

Aguilar wheeled, threw him one keen scowl, then laughed.

"Not so, my friend. There is no mistake. This is the lady whom I sought here, and who belongs to me, as we agreed."

Burke bowed, with stately courtesy, to Doña Inez.

"Nevertheless, I think there is a mistake," he said amiably. "Or am I wrong, *señorita?* Of course, if you love this man, then I'm the last person on earth to stand in the way."

"Love him?" Her lip curled in scorn. "I would rather love a snake, a reptile!"

Aguilar laughed a little.

"She will change her mind soon enough, my captain," he said jauntily. "By the time she reaches Le Cap, you'll see."

Burke shook his head. "I fear she is not going to Le Cap," he said.

"Eh?" Aguilar straightened slightly. "What mean you? Did you not agree? You can't deny it, as you denied the other."

"My dear *señor,*" said Burke coolly, while the girl looked from one to the other with swift hot eyes, "I never deny my word, nor give it hastily. You gave us to understand that the woman you sought was in love with you. Now, for a love affair I have sympathy of the greatest, I assure you, provided it is two-sided. But you know the orders given my men; any ravishment is punished with death. Remember, my dear *señor,* I am a gentleman, and such an idea goes against the grain."

Aguilar's face went red, then became deathly pale, chill as cold clay.

"*Señor,*" he said haughtily, "I desire this woman. It was to obtain her that I brought you here, gave this place into your hands."

"Betrayed your own people to buccaneers, eh?" struck in Doña Inez.

"None the less, she wants none of you," said Burke, and turned to her. "Do you desire to claim my protection against this man?"

"You are a *caballero,*" she returned quickly. "Yes!"

Burke bowed, and then looked at the Spaniard.

"You have heard, my friend. There is no more to be said. This lady is not to be molested by you or any one else."

For an instant Aguilar looked at him with bitter, venomous eyes, then shrugged.

"Very well," he said, and turning on his heel, strode from the room. Burke looked after him thoughtfully, for he had expected the man to draw sword upon him, at the least. Then, as Doña Inez came to him and caught his arm in impulsive thanks, he bowed over her slender fingers and laughed softly into her dark eyes.

'Fear not, little dove," he said in Spanish. "You'll not be harmed; my men are guarding the doors."

So, turning, he strode out of the room.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

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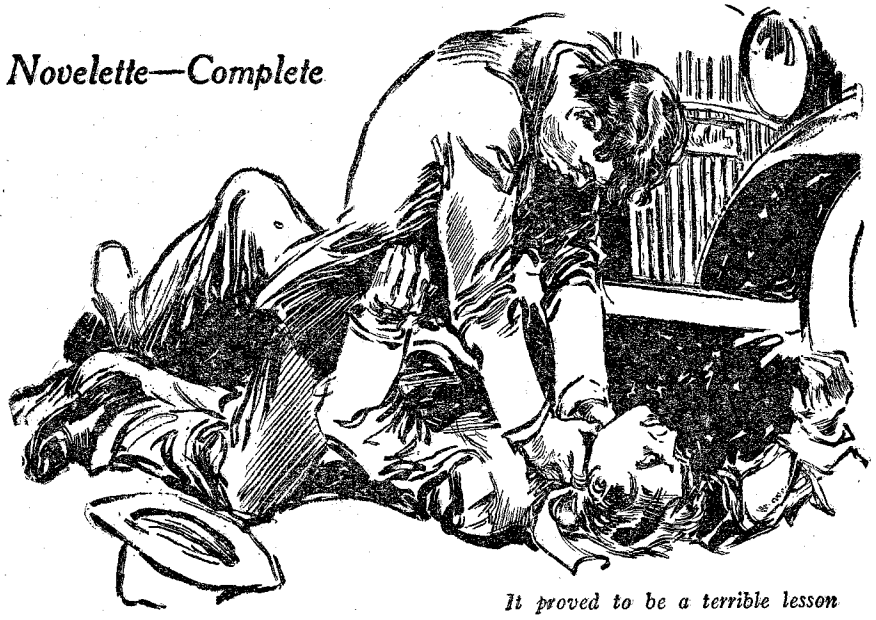
Cajan Code

A drunken son and a half-savage woods youth—with these two elements old Colonel Burdett made an experiment that was to startle his Alabama friends

By ANTHONY M. RUD

Author of "Cactus Cache," "Strong Man," etc.

Novelette—Complete



It proved to be a terrible lesson

CHAPTER I

DISOWNED.

AFTER passing through the gate, which was nearly a mile across the brownish cottonfields, white-dotted with ripening bolls, the crowded car went slowly along the private road toward the old Burdett plantation home. In the moonlight a group of three moss-bearded live-oaks showed at a sort of bay in the fence. There was a well there. Cotton pickers came there in season to slake their burning thirst with the cool water.

"Hush now!" The car driver spoke warningly. "You-all wait for me here, and don't make any noise. The old man is as strait-laced as a deacon."

"Don't be long, Ar-thur," drawled a soft feminine voice.

"Huh, your governor used to wangle a mean julep, himself," whispered one of the male occupants. "My dad used to tell how he and Bellamy Marriott—"

Arthur Burdett slid out from under the wheel. He reeled slightly as he started, but squared his shoulders and kept on toward the big white-pillared house, which showed through a farther group of live-oaks, magnolias and umbrella-shaped chinaberry trees.

The young skulker circled to approach from the rear where a long string of kitchens and quarters for the Negro servants leaned against one another.

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There was not a sound, except a low, monotonous groan and wheeze. Arthur Burdett grinned. That was old Cynthia, who always snored.

By his wrist watch Arthur saw it was two minutes of twelve o'clock. There was no sign of a light; no, his white-haired father was not waiting up, this time. Arthur breathed with relief. Nearly fifty years separated the ages of the two, and far more than half a century in habits, training and all the various factors which enter into the definition of an Alabama gentleman.

Moving with a quiet celerity that suggested this was not the first occasion he had entered his own home as a burglar, the youth lifted one side of a leaning cellar door, laid it carefully back, and then stepped down into the cool blackness. As his feet touched the cement-hard clay of the floor he switched on a small electric flash, stooping a little to avoid the big overhead pipes of the hot-air furnace.

Back at the other end of the cellar was a plank partition extending across. In this was a single door, held fast by a big padlock and hasp. Without hesitation Arthur took a key from the watch pocket of his trousers, removed the padlock and threw wide the door. A pungent scent of old whisky in barrels swept out to his nostrils.

There were two rows of fifty-gallon white oak casks, ten in number, on one side of the room. Opposite were racks, with wine bottles lying on their sides. On the floor were a dozen or more crocks and jugs of varying sizes, each with a corncob stopper.

Arthur bent and picked up one of these, pulling the cork and sniffing to make sure it held nothing that had gone poisonous. He tipped it, and a half cupful of liquid spilled. Then he bent down, adjusting the mouth of the jug to a spigot on one of the barrels.

"*Ungg-a!*"

It was a horrible, throaty sound behind him. Accompanying it, the barrel of a rifle poked the kneeling man in the small of the back.

Completely sober, or given a mo-

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ment in which to think, Arthur Burdett surely would have recognized the newcomer by just that strange, awful cry—one which Tom-Harry, the deaf-mute butler, never uttered except in moments of stress or physical agony.

But the young man did not wait to think. Snapping off the flash light, he leaped erect, swinging his arm and thrusting the rifle barrel to one side. The small weapon—it was a .22 used for rabbits—exploded like the crack of a bull whip. Head down and fists swinging, Arthur charged his would-be captor, who now bulked large between him and the gray rectangle of cellar door.

Two strong, heavy arms clutched blindly—clutched and grabbed him. Arthur screeched suddenly, bringing up his knee and butting, to break the hold. He did not succeed. Though the Negro butler was close to sixty years of age, his heavy, knotted arms held fast. And from his throat came a succession of those terrible, wordless cries which were his only means of raising an alarm, after the single rifle shot.

"Let go of me, Tom-Harry!" gasped Arthur, finally realizing who it was that had trapped him. "Let go, I say!"

But the Negro, though an adept lip-reader, could not see in the darkness. He naturally did not obey. He had been sleeping on a cot down here in the basement, for the express purpose of catching the unknown marauder who had been looting the liquor cellar, and now he made sure of his captive.

SUDDENLY the electric lights flashed on, and a tall, white-haired man stood there. He was fully dressed in long-tailed black coat of old-fashioned cut, pressed trousers, shirt with immaculate wing collar and black tie. In his attire the only concession made to the hour was a pair of Congress gaiters on his feet instead of the usual shoes or boots.

"You may let him up now, Tom-Harry," said Colonel Burdett coldly, gesturing so the servitor understood. "I suspected it might be Arthur. Well, young man, this is a new rôle indeed—for the last of the Burdetts!"

He paused a moment, and the long hands at his sides clenched tightly. When he spoke again his voice betrayed the bitter shame and fury within his patrician heart.

"Unable to hold your liquor well, and yet stealing more whisky for another all-night party! Well, on those other occasions when you became maudlin, I warned you, young man! You understand the penalty?"

"But, father!" cried the youth, sobering fast. "You don't understand! Why isn't half of this liquor mine, anyway? I didn't consider this stealing—not by a damned sight!"

"Go upstairs, Tom-Harry," spoke and motioned Colonel Burdett. The black man bowed, shuffled to the stairway and disappeared.

"Well, that is a novel viewpoint which had not occurred to me," continued Colonel Burdett. "Let's see. I suppose you have your gay young friends out here somewhere. In the car?"

"Yes!" snapped Arthur, defiance beginning to enliven his rather pudgy, dissipated countenance.

"Very well. You will please invite them in, and entertain them according to your own ideas. The servants will take your orders—for two days. At the end of that time Marcy will take them—and you—*any damn place you wish to go!*

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"I shall not be here for the two days. When I return you had better be gone, else I shall have you jailed as a common felon! And my one last request of you is this: while you are going to hell on the money left you by your angel mother, will you kindly assume another name than Burdett? Never before to my knowledge has it been associated with conduct unbecoming a gentleman!"

"But, father! You don't mean this! Wh-where are you going?" Real panic was in Arthur's words now.

"Kindly do not use that name again! I am going first to my lawyers in Mobile. Then—well, if you must know, I am going on a search up into the piney woods. I regard it as scarcely possible, but I intend to hunt for a young man more worthless than yourself! I shall look among the Cajans!"

CHAPTER II.

OUTCAST.

THE young man in charge of the "commissary" at Citronelle looked up at his distinguished, white-haired visitor, then down at the ten dollar bill on the table.

"I've heard of you, colonel," he said with respect. "And I sho' want to oblige. Ten dollars is a pile of money, these days, yet—" He shrugged, but the old man waited, stony-faced.

"The Cajans only come down about once a month, you know. It's getting 'long toward four o'clock now, and—"

"Do I understand that you are afraid?" Colonel Burdett's tone was icy.

The young man glanced at him with a humorous quirk to his wide mouth. "Not for myself, I'm not," he denied. "They know me, you see. But they don't exactly take kindly to strangers." He got up, frowning. "If you feel like taking your chances, I think I can find the sort of boy you want. Jules LeFevre—"

"He must be under twenty years of age, and as ignorant as possible. Also, he must not have any disease," broke in Colonel Burdett.

The young man grinned and nodded. He walked out to the car, pausing a moment to speak to an old black man who loafed on the front stoop of the commissary. With directions to Burdett's chauffeur, who manifestly did not like to proceed further into the piney woods, they got under way.

"Jules ought to suit. He's clean and healthy, but I don't really believe he's ever seen a town of any kind. His clan, the LeFevres, run about as wild as they come. One of 'em strayed over as far as the main line of the M. & O. a couple of years back. Thought the engine was chasing him. He ran straight down the track, then stopped and fired both barrels of his shotgun. Well, the engine survived!" The young man chuckled.

Not the vestige of a smile came to the countenance of Colonel Burdett. "I see. That is exactly the kind of boy I want!" he said with grim determination.

"Well," drawled the imperturbably cheerful guide, "I'm just hoping none of the LeFevres gets the notion this car is chasing him! I don't s'pose there's been an automobile on these hyar wood roads since back about 1900!"

"What?" The old man was startled for an instant. "Why, they didn't *have* automobiles in Alabama in 1900!"

"Exactly!" drawled the guide. "You and me are getting along fine, Colonel Burdett. If it wasn't for that

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ten dollars you just give me, I might be applying for that funny job of yours myself!"

BUT for the reassurance of the man from the Citronelle commissary, Jules LeFevre never would have approached the awesome limousine, with its black driver and black-coated, white-haired owner. But he came now, scowling a little, and carrying an old single-barreled shotgun.

"I've told him as much as I rightly knew," said the guide in a quiet, worried voice. "I reckon I've earned your money, colonel! Will you be going back my way?"

"I think so," nodded Burdett. "How do you do, my boy?" he asked courteously, smiling and nodding with a complete change of manner. He saw a barefoot youth almost as tall as himself, with dark brown wavy hair and brown eyes that held a sullen light as they contemplated this magnificent stranger.

Jules LeFevre wore two garments, an open-necked shirt of blue chambray and a dilapidated pair of overalls hanging by one strap.

He was undeniably dirty, but undiseased and with promise of great strength in his big frame, sloping shoulders and narrow waist. Hands and feet were small. In every way he was typically Cajan, blood descendant of the exiled French folk of Longfellow's "Evangeline," the Acadians of far-away Grand Pré, Chignecto and Port Royal.

Possibly there was a tincture of Choctaw Indian in his ancestry; for these tall, good-natured redmen of the Southern wilderness had welcomed the French exiles hospitably in 1752, and finally intermarried with some of them. This would account for the boy's height, and also for the light golden-tan of his complexion. He had inherited no other racial strains, however—his appearance testified to his pure Acadian breeding, with that slight Choctaw influence. His language was of the simplest, but an almost unrenderable hodgepodge of English, French and Indian. Because of what happened later to Jules LeFevre, the little talking he did may better be translated into English.

Burdett did not seem to expect any reply at once. He was exerting himself now to be as reassuring and as courteous as an old-school Southern gentleman knew how to be; and it probably startled the guide from Citronelle far more than it did this untamed creature of the woods.

"I hope, sir, that you will be able to come with me. I have a job which will pay well, and which I think you will be able to do with ease."

"Where go? What do?" inquired Jules. "How much?"

"Well, I'll go into that more fully after a while. But see here." He pulled a five dollar bill from his case and passed it over to the Cajan, who regarded it gravely but with no sign of recognition in his brown eyes. "I'll pay you that every day you work for me! I'll get you new clothes, and give you all you want to eat! All you have—"

"Beg pardon, sir," interrupted the guide, whose expression of astonishment was becoming chronic now. "I doubt that he's ever seen any paper money. They only have silver—and damn' little of that," he added in an undertone. "Let me change it for you."

He fished in his pocket, coming up with four silver dollars and enough small change to make the five.

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The Cajan's expression altered instantly. It was more money than he had ever possessed at one time, and the thought of getting this much every single day for working was almost too much to grasp.

"What is it that you want?" he cried eagerly, fingering the money.

"Well," Colonel Burdett considered, then took the plunge. "I have lost a son, about your age, Jules. I want you to come and take his place!"

"Oh, my God!" said the guide, inexpressibly shocked.

Jules, however, paid no attention. Cajan relations were more in clans than family groups, so he saw nothing particularly strange in the proposal—nothing half as strange, for instance, as this big, shiny ox-cart which ran through the woods with a humming noise—and without oxen. The mirror-like chromium and the sleek heather-and-gray paint fascinated him. He reached out a finger to touch it, and involuntarily flinched as though the metal had been hot.

"Of a certainty, I will go," he said. "It will be a new job for me, being a son, for I have no father. Will we go as you came, in this?" He pointed at the car; and the Negro chauffeur, who had been bursting with the effort of dismayed repression, broke into a whinnying squeal.

"Be silent!" commanded Colonel Burdett, and it was the flinty voice of the Spanish-American regimental commander.

The black shivered and was quiet.

"Yes, we will travel in this car," answered Burdett, turning again in kindly fashion toward the Cajan. "After a while I will show you what makes it go. But now, the first thing we have to do is to get back to Citronelle. I want you to have a bath and clean clothes, Jules. I suppose there is some place with running water, and a store at which we can get a presentable outfit?" The last was addressed to the commissary youth.

"I can fix him up," said the latter shortly. He had completely lost his appearance of good humor. "But you, Colonel Burdett, I think you had better go and have your head examined!"

The planter did not answer. He was looking forward through the years of his bitter revenge—and wondering, more than likely, upon just whom that revenge really was going to fall.

CHAPTER III.

HATRED AT SIGHT.

JULIUS BURDETT—for that was the manner in which the colonel signed the Cajan boy's name in the register of the Hotel Citronelle that evening—ate the first meal of his life at a table equipped with cloth, napkins and silver. Only the knife looked at all familiar; and it was dull and of a shape not serviceable, in the Cajan's eyes.

But in spite of the fact that two waitresses stared at him aghast, Colonel Burdett maintained his attitude of soothing reassurance, and the Cajan wolfed down viands he scarcely knew by sight. With the quarter of an apple pie, a wedge of cheese, one-fifth of a pound of Scuppernong grapes, a cup of black coffee, and a dish of magnolia figs in heavy, spiced syrup, all as dessert, Julius sighed and expressed himself as satisfied.

"Do we eat like that often?" he asked.

Colonel Burdett did not understand at first, for he was not well versed in the outlandish dialect of Cajan land, but finally he smiled a wintry smile.

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"Just as often as you wish, my boy!" he promised.

"*Sacré!* I will like this job, then!" decided Julius.

Leaving the dining room, Colonel Burdett—proud and unapproachable of carriage and mien—led the way to the winding stairs that gave to the bedchambers upstairs. He was surprised to see Julius hesitate, eying the long staircase with grave suspicion.

The boy, his elder companion realized, had acted a little the same way when led up the flight of four steps to the front gallery of the hotel. Now Julius, faced with his first venture into the second floor of a building, hung back with evident reluctance. He would have gone up a ladder like a chimpanzee, but the feel of a soft carpet under his new shoes, and the semi-darkness of the winding stairs, made him fear a trap.

"Come on!" bade Colonel Burdett, going on after one or two attempts to lead the Cajan youth.

He had reached the first landing before Julius followed. And then what happened started a gale of laughter from the curious waitresses and a handful of guests, a gale of laughter which was to sweep through the entire State of Alabama—and test the Burdett nerve to its uttermost.

Julius came up on his hands and feet, cautiously, like a great monkey!

Once upstairs, the white-faced man got him swiftly into the pair of rooms they would share. He was surprised to see a burning flush upon the Cajan's cheeks—and was to learn then that the deadliest weapon of all to use against this hypersensitive woodsman was the laughter of ridicule.

"They laugh—at me!" choked Julius.

"At us!" corrected the colonel grimly. "But don't you pay any attention, lad. In two years' time they will be bumping their foreheads on the floor!"

For the first time, as he lay in his bed waiting for the sleep which would not come for hours, the man saw the whole bitter horror of the *tour de force* to which he had set his hand.

But he had no thought in the world of receding. The Burdetts had pride, and stubbornness of purpose.

ON the afternoon of the next day, while Colonel Burdett, Julius and the colored chauffeur traveled the one hundred and seventy miles of the JH highway from the south, affairs were in a state of gloomy apprehension at the Burdett plantation.

There had been no drinking party, of course. When Colonel Burdett left abruptly in the limousine after the scene with his son, Arthur, shaken and sick at heart, had brought his five companions to the house. But that was only for a sort of council of war. The others realized quickly that the colonel had meant exactly what he said, and decided that they would get away as speedily as possible.

The two young men and one of the girls were neighbors, in a manner of speaking, and might have their own troubles at home when this leaked out. Connie Reardon and the other girl came from Montgomery, thirty miles away.

Only Connie was not ready to quit Arthur Burdett. She tried to get him to leave; but when he gloomily refused, she and her friend from Montgomery stayed on, while the other three were driven home by Marcy, the second chauffeur.

"I've been a fool and know it," said Arthur bitterly. "I'm going to stay

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and tell him so. Then he can arrest me if he wants to!"

Connie looked thoughtful. "Better wait a week," she suggested. "Then you'll know if you mean it—or if it's just the liquor dying in you."

Connie and the other girl talked it over that night, coming to the not unnatural conclusion that perhaps Colonel Burdett had been in the right—and that staying till his return could only make matters worse. They took leave of the shaken Arthur after breakfast.

"Just be a man, Arthur," suggested Connie, speaking softly for his ear alone. "I'll always be your friend, but I want to see you snap out of this."

"Oh, I'll be a man all right!" said Arthur half angrily.

Shaking her head a trifle, Connie turned away. Even she could see that this was no mood of sincere contrition.

So when shortly before five o'clock the big limousine, dusty-red from the dry roads, drove up to the white house among the oaks, Arthur was alone, and pacing the front gallery.

He had smoked cigarettes incessantly since dawn, and had taken three drinks from the decanter on the sideboard to quiet his ragged nerves. His mood of aching remorse had given way partially at least to a rising sense of injustice. Did a man like his father, famous if not notorious in his youth as an owner of fast horses, and a beau among the South's pretty women—three of whom he had married in due course—think that a son of his could be a hypocritical idiot?

ARTHUR snapped away his cigarette. He stared at the car occupants as they alighted, and his face paled. A tall, uncouth boy in queer-fitting clothes sat beside his father. A Cajan! Gasping a little in the rage which suddenly flooded his being, Arthur came down to the shell drive. White-faced, trembling, he confronted Colonel Burdett.

"So you—*d-did* it!" he cried, turning to stare with burning eyes upon Julius.

The Cajan, who had regarded him with quiet wonder, suddenly tightened, crouching a little. From the heart of the piney woods, he needed no further warning than that murderous glance. Bobcats glared like that when cornered.

"Yes, this is the boy who will take your place," said the colonel in a brittle tone. "I see you have not obeyed my request to get out, so I—"

That was as far as he got. With a screech of overmastering fury, Arthur Burdett leaped. What was meant for a sledge-hammer blow to the chiseled, regular features of the upstart Cajan, landed glancingly upon the heavy shock of curly hair as Julius ducked.

The impetus of the sudden attack carried both against the running board of the car, where they fell, rolling to the white shell drive. Even with Arthur, the little fistic science and thought of fair play which would have been his ordinarily, were forgotten. He attacked madly, clawing, biting, endeavoring to gouge and rend his adversary—but accomplishing little because of the very disorganization of his fury. Men have to be familiar with the knock-down, drag-out type of battle, and fight it with a certain amount of science, or they are surprisingly ineffectual.

The Cajan knew it and nothing else. Inside ten seconds he had slammed an elbow crushingly into Arthur's nose, wrenched one shoulder, half-choked him, and scrubbed him into the scour-

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ing shell until the clothes hung in shreds from his right side.

Hearing the tumult, young Marcy, the second chauffeur, came running. Joe, who had driven the limousine, climbed down with a wrench in his hand. Both, loyal to the Burdett blood —little as they admired Arthur—would have massacred the unknown Cajan. But the colonel restrained them.

"Wait!" he thundered. "This will be a needed lesson, I think!"

Needed or not, it proved to be a terrible lesson. After his first burst of fury, Arthur weakened rapidly. Dazed, stunned, bleeding at mouth and nose, he still fought on—but blindly now. The Cajan, remorseless, came on top, and started choking his opponent to death.

That was where Colonel Burdett interfered. Issuing brief commands, he helped pry Julius from his victim, and push the Cajan back to a seat on the steps of the gallery. The latter, understanding that a final kill was not the order of the day with this strange people, relaxed, although his dark eyes remained fastened upon the recumbent form of Arthur. At a second's notice he would have been in the thick of the fray again.

Arthur was still unconscious when the colonel had him carried into the limousine, and cloths tied around his head where he seemed to be bleeding the most. One ear was mangled. It showed tooth marks.

"Here," said the colonel to Joe, his driver, handing over a sheaf of large bank notes. "Take these, and deposit them to his account at the infirmary at Montgomery. Register him there as Arthur Jones. Do you understand that?"

Joe blinked. "Jones, sah?" he repeated. "You say *Jones?*"

The colonel nodded. "Arthur Jones!" he repeated with emphasis. "You may tell every one that this—this young man is a son of mine no longer!"

Then it was a hard thing for him, but he turned to the Cajan as the big car moved softly away. His expression was solicitous, though nothing but pure hate lay in his heart.

"I hope you were not hurt badly," he said. "Come inside, boy, and let's see."

CHAPTER IV.

MANUFACTURED MIRACLES.

BLOOD of the pioneer and adventurer was strong in the veins of Julius Burdett. The fight, as long as he had whipped his adversary, was nothing more than an incident. He had received nothing worse than scratches and one loosened tooth. And he was able to enjoy and wonder at every marvelous detail of his new life, from the first.

The comfortable, old-fashioned mansion, built before the Civil War and twice restored—the last time when central heating first became accepted in the Southland—evoked his profoundest astonishment.

The enormous, high-ceiled rooms, the quiet luxury of rugs, furniture and eighty-year-old converted crystal chandeliers impressed him more than anything else with the difference between these people and his own Cajans. Back there was squalor, starvation, not even cleanliness. Here was so much of the finest that the world afforded, that at first Julius was like a young knight in his first suit of armor. He scarcely could move for the weight of it.

Colonel Burdett planned every mo-

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ment, every move. The Cajan was broken in slowly to the use of every ordinary article. He was visited by a tailor and measured for every conceivable kind of suit.

A barber came, and expressed admiration for the effect he achieved—using as a final touch a tonic for subduing the rebellious brown locks. He left a bottle of the stuff. Boxes of underwear, pyjamas, shirts, collars, neckwear, socks and handkerchiefs came. When the first suit arrived, Colonel Burdett himself drove in to Montgomery and supervised the buying of boots, shoes of all sorts, and slippers.

While he was at the city, Colonel Burdett paid a brief visit to the office of the infirmary, but emerged immediately. The young man called Arthur Jones had left two days after he came. His left ear was marked, but otherwise he was not seriously injured.

Julius became acquainted immediately with one functionary, a valet, that Arthur never had sported. With the Cajan, naturally, the colonel saw such an adviser and helper would be a necessity.

The Cajan's first tutor, and one who remained with him throughout his stay with the colonel, was a tough-appearing, still rather competent welterweight pugilist who rejoiced in the name of the Tia Juana Kid. Though the nearest he ever had come to Mexico was this very spot in Alabama, and he had ceased being a "kid" some twenty years before, he respected this easy job, got to like Julius and admire his possibilities, and by and large did well.

"You fight earnestly—but not in our fashion," said the colonel dryly and with a slight shiver. "I want you to do what this man tells you."

Julius nodded. He had ceased to be surprised.

"All right, buddy!" grinned the Kid, holding out a gnarled hand. "C'mon, le's go see this gym they got fixed up on the third floor."

Julius shook, winced at the unexpected strength of the newcomer, and followed. Up there he stripped, was punched and tested all over, introduced to gloves, and given a short lesson in the theory of self defense. He rather liked it, especially with the rub-down and shower that followed his workout.

HE had two other tutors, one a middle-aged Frenchman named LeClair who taught in the high school at Selma, and the other a red-headed youth, a junior at the university, who was forced to earn money before completing his course. The latter's name was Morgan. He was quick, keen as a knife blade, and proved himself a natural teacher. After his first few sessions with Julius he worked himself into a sort of delighted frenzy.

He probed the Cajan's mind, found it clean and nearly blank, and started in to fill that mind with just exactly what it ought to have—and nothing else. Wherein Ted Morgan proved himself a zealot and a gentleman. Before the first year was up, all knew it.

The Cajan's days were filled from six in the morning until ten at night. With Morgan, who shortly came to live at the house, he learned to play a fairly keen game of tennis, and to make the golf course at Selma in the neighborhood of 110. With boxing, swimming and these other outdoor pursuits his shoulders broadened.

He became slightly swarthier, undeniably handsome in a dark, fierce way. His body filled out, and his forearms knotted under the black hair when his fists clenched. The Tia Juana Kid was struttingly proud of his pupil.

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"Make a champ of him, jes' gimme a chance, boss!" he boasted once to Colonel Burdett.

But the white-haired man shook his head slightly. What he really did intend now for Julius had begun to puzzle him. He felt no real affection for the lad, and had not formally adopted him; but the easy-mannered, soft-voiced cheeriness that so strangely belied the Cajan's rather arresting visage had got under his skin in a peculiar fashion. What could there be in heredity, he reflected with bitterness—remembering how he had cherished the Burdett name and traditions through the decades—when this outlander, this pariah, could step right in and become an almost undetectable imitation of what a Southern gentleman should be?

He never had learned the great lesson of America; that a gentleman is distinguished first by a clean body and brain, and then by his courtesy and sympathy in respect to others. But the piney woods boy was to teach him that.

Once thoroughly accustomed to his surroundings, able to drive his own car and order his own day—except for the time taken up with tutors—Julius became tremendously interested in the Burdett plantation. A small army of blacks who had their cottages over toward the swamp to eastward worked the land under the direction of two mulatto bosses and a white supervisor named Kinney. The latter was a graduate of Michigan Agricultural College, and an up-to-date scientific farmer.

"Our year's work only begins today," he told Julius, the morning after the last crop had been shipped. "In fact, what we do now through the winter—fertilizing, winter-fallowing, and all, means everything for the crops later. Of course, it isn't as exciting, but if you want to come along—"

Julius did. Through the months of soil preparation, through the planting, cultivating and caring for all the new crops, he spent hours nearly every day with Kinney. It was just as well, from Colonel Burdett's standpoint. The colonel was himself conducting a daily school of etiquette, though this was a fact of which Julius never became conscious. Between the colonel and Muggins, the valet, the Cajan gradually and without those horrible mistakes and embarrassments which would have been all too natural, learned how to dress and conduct himself better than passably well.

Summer came, then another harvest. So Julius learned much concerning the way to coax twenty-five bushels of corn from an acre—where on Cajan land eight bushels was considered exceptional. More and more, Julius thought of those people back in the woods, whose very lives might be saved at times by the ability to apply his new knowledge.

In his own mind and heart Julius Burdett was still a Cajan. At times he was troubled, too, by the thought of that youth whose place he had usurped. The fact of usurpation he had learned during the first two or three months, but after that no one would speak to him of Arthur Jones—the Arthur Burdett that was. Evidently the colonel had issued his instructions.

CHAPTER V.

THE ARISTOCRAT.

"YOUNG" BELLAMY MARRIOTT was a man fifty-three years of age. He was fourteen years the junior of Colonel James Burdett, just as his own father had been fourteen years the colonel's senior.

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"Old" Bellamy Marriott, who died at the age of eighty, one year previously, had been the chum of middle and old age with Colonel Burdett. After the old man's passing, a good measure of that personal friendship had been given to and reciprocated by Bellamy Marriott, Junior.

Since the night he had discovered Arthur rifling the wine cellar, the colonel had neither seen nor spoken to Bellamy Marriott or the latter's lovely wife, also a friend of long standing.

The reason for this terrible lapse of more than a year, one which doubtless hurt all three of these rather lonely Southerners to the quick, had a good deal to do with Maxine Marriott. Maxine now was just nearing nineteen years of age. She was golden-brown and fluffy of hair, blue eyed, slender and yet eminently satisfying to the male eye. She had won, the previous year, the distinction of being voted the most p o p u l a r girl in the freshman class at Tulane.

She came home this blowy and crisp twentieth of December, to start her Christmas vacation. Since fourteen years of age she had been engaged to Arthur Burdett; and the fact that these two adjoining plantations, if merged, would make the largest and finest plantation in all the New South doubtless had its part in bringing about the early engagement. What the young people had thought about it had not been precisely clear—probably not even to themselves.

Colonel Burdett, breakfasting at eight o'clock on the twenty-second of December, with Julius as was his custom, looked across critically at the young athlete eating his grapefruit. The young Cajan had been up since six, had dog-trotted a half mile with the Tia Juana Kid, then boxed three fast rounds. After that had come a rub-down and shower. A glow of good humor and perfect health underlay the dark golden tan of the Cajan's cheeks.

"You look especially well to-day, Julius," said the colonel. As always toward this youth whom he had got over hating but still could not love, his voice was courteous and less personal than a brand-new cake of bath soap.

"If I felt any better, I'd have to amputate something," grinned Julius, using one of Ted Morgan's expressions. "You're rather hale and hearty yourself, sir."

"I've never had to complain about my health," admitted the elder, then added to himself, "but I'll need every bit of it to-day!" Aloud he said, "Let's see. Just how old are you?"

The smile left the Cajan's dark eyes, and he shook his head. "I don't know exactly, except I was the youngest. About twenty now, I think, though it might be a year or so either way."

The colonel nodded slowly. "We'll call it twenty—and present you with a birthday, later on. This morning about ten I want you to come and make a short call with me. It will be on a man named Bellamy Marriott, a very old friend. Tell your valet. He'll fix you with coat and the rest of the correct attire."

So it was that the Cajan went for his first social visit, and this in an almost extinct circle which in its day had been practically as searching and exclusive as the Back Bay Bostonese, the F. F. V.'s of Virginia, and the genuine Creoles of New Orleans.

IT was near eleven when the colonel and Julius descended from the limousine and walked up between the white pillars fronting the near-by Marriott home. A Negro butler-footman

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opened the door, and for a second an expression of panic flashed across his heavy features.

"It's all right, Lon," said Colonel Burdett quietly. "Is Mr. Marriott home?"

"Yes, sah. I—won't you-all come in? I'll tell Mr. Marriott, sah." The man evidently feared what might happen, but ingrained courtesy and hospitality kept the upper hand. He led them into a beautifully furnished morning room, after relieving them of wraps.

"Hello, Jim!" The voice of Bellamy Marriott was quiet, though his eyes looked grave. He came up, a fine figure of a man showing only a trifle of rotundity and a slight thinning of his iron-gray hair because of years. He shook hands with the colonel.

"Beth will be here in a moment," he said, referring to his wife. "Ah, here she is."

The meeting that ensued was difficult to all—the more so for a reason Colonel Burdett was to learn presently—but it was carried off with little surface indication of the fact. Beth Marriott and Bellamy were courteous hosts, though distant toward the outrageous person Colonel Burdett had the audacity to introduce as his son.

Of course the two had heard of this uncouth pariah, and some of the circumstances regarding his presence in the Burdett household. At the moment, regarding him, they were astounded and perchance a trifle resentful to learn that in no way did Julius justify the horrible tales. Why, the upstart was handsome! And his bearing, though shy, was correct in every particular! Here was no savage hillman of French descent, but a real Southerner.

Talk went along easily until the interruption, one which the two Marriotts doubtless had been dreading. There came the sound of youthful voices just outside.

"I wish to tell you, Jim," broke in Marriott hurriedly, "that we have house guests. One is Miss Constance Reardon, a friend of Maxine's. The other is—Mr. Arthur Jones!"

Colonel Burdett stiffened, and for a split second his eyes closed. Then he bowed. Just then the two girls and Arthur entered, the young man more sullen of countenance than could have been expected. Evidently the three had not been warned.

A sudden silence fell, broken after one heartbeat by Mrs. Marriott making the introductions to Connie. These were acknowledged by prim little bows. Meanwhile Maxine and Arthur stood motionless, staring at the ogre they had pictured so differently—the outcast Cajan who had ferociously chewed the ear of a surprised and defenseless boy . . . so the story had gone, at any rate.

"Oh, I—ah—beg your pardon!" cried Arthur, turning white as a ghost. "I—I must be going. Business downstairs. You'll excuse me?" And with that he turned and fled.

Connie Reardon watched him, a disapproving frown coming for an instant to her forehead. She was beginning to understand that Arthur was yellow. She knew it for certain when a moment later the billiard balls in the basement began clicking as if pounded hard about the table.

THE fifteen minutes which followed mattered only in what was carefully left unsaid. Bellamy Marriott, his wife and Colonel Burdett carried on bravely, and an outsider perhaps might not have understood that

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anything was wrong. But horrible teeth were chewing at the hearts of all three. All knew that this fearful burlesque of friendship probably was the end.

Maxine it was who brought matters to a head. She had been silently regarding the Cajan, and wonder was growing in her young heart. If he indeed was the awful beast he had been pictured, she intended to find it out. The last couple of days had told her all she wanted to know about Arthur; he was slipping fast. It really was Connie Reardon's worry anyhow, for that unfortunate girl cared for him — and Maxine Marriott decidedly did not. But perhaps something—something—

"We have some Christmas wine standing in a jug," said Maxine, during a break in the conversation. "The Germans call it *Glühwein*—just claret, a little whisky, cinnamon and cloves. Won't you come out and help, Mr. Burdett," she asked, "while Connie and I heat up a few glasses?" The question was directed at Julius.

"Surely," he said, rising and bowing to his hostess. With the rather blank-faced Connie, they disappeared toward the rear of the house. And what actually happened to Julius during the rest of the time he was deftly handled by a serious-eyed young goddess—the most beautiful woman he ever had seen, and one who made him catch his breath every time she spoke to him—the Cajan had difficulty in remembering afterward.

Actually they heated up the wine, talking trivialities. Then Connie was sent in with three glasses for the elders. When she returned a sort of signal passed between her and her friend. It resulted in a pale-faced Connie taking two more glasses on a tray down to the billiard room.

"Now we'll take our glasses in here to the breakfast nook, Mr. Burdett," announced Maxine straightforwardly. "I want to talk to you!"

"Charmed!" said Julius vaguely. For the first time in his life he felt enormously tall, gawky and uncouth. Though he did not suspect the fact, he was giving a pleasant, rather thrilling impression of exactly the reverse. There was something about him that both attracted and repelled Maxine; she could not explain that, and certainly did not try just then.

"I know you are going to think me impertinent, and a busybody," she said, leaning forward with her elbows on the little table between them. "I'm going to apologize in advance for everything, and you may hate me if you wish—"

"That I'll never do!" said Julius with emphasis. He searched her blue eyes, and a little flush stole up into the girl's cheeks. "Certainly no apology would be in keeping. I—I am not entirely blind. You and Miss Reardon evidently are friends of Mr.—Mr. Jones."

"Yes."

"And you want to know something."

"Yes."

"Well, so do I!" said Julius in a serious tone. "You see, every one refuses to tell me anything—why I am the guest of Colonel Burdett, for instance. Or *paid* guest would be better!" he added with a hint of bitterness.

"Guest!" flashed the girl. "Then he has not adopted you?"

"By no means," he said quietly. "And I do not think he intends doing so. He pays me one hundred and fifty dollars a month regularly, and all my expenses besides. I have not had use for a cent of that sum. It lies in the Selma bank. Colonel Burdett has me puzzled. He has no affection for me.

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I think he still loves—Arthur. What is it all about, anyway?"

FOR a moment the girl stared at him. There were quiggly little chills skittering across the middle of her back.

"D'you know," she said, with the appalling irrelevance of young womanhood, "you'd look like a foreign nobleman, if you'd let your mustache grow?"

It was the Cajan's turn to blush. He was stricken wordless.

"Oh, forgive me!" she said quickly. "We want this whole story, don't we? Suppose you tell me all you know, right from the beginning. And then I'll tell you all *I* know. Between us—"

"Agreed," said Julius. Rather somberly he began, telling a little of the strange, half-wild Cajans and their life in the piney woods. From this he went directly into his meeting and experiences with Colonel Burdett. Somewhere, perhaps from the redheaded Tod Morgan, he seemed to have caught a sense of humor, for several times the girl smiled slightly.

"Then you really know nothing at all about Arthur?" she asked when he had finished.

"Practically nothing. I only saw him once before. That time he leaped at me without warning, and we fought."

"*He* leaped at you!" Maxine echoed, her full mouth tightening. She was finding it impossible to disbelieve this clear-headed young man; and all the while her estimate of Arthur was sinking.

In turn then, however, she told him Arthur's side of the story. There were some obvious discrepancies, but Julius did not comment upon them. The only really pertinent thing he discovered was that Arthur, since being disinherited, had been cutting a fast pace tnrough his mother's fortune, and that his health and mental balance both were suffering. That, combined with the feeling he had in respect to Colonel Burdett, made Julius more thoughtful than ever.

"I—I don't know what to do," the girl finished despairingly. "I was hoping there was something—"

"I'll do something!" said Julius quietly, and rose from the table. His thoughts were racing. Gratitude, loyalty, a certain kind of altruism—and then a strange feeling he already suspected was love—all were in a turmoil in his brain. He was the center of a great deal of unhappiness. Very well, he would get out of the whirlpool, and in doing so he would try to pull the roiling waters with him!

"Miss Marriott," he said, looking down away from her face at the two untouched glasses of wine, "I am going to ask you to trust me."

She arose and frankly held out her hand. "I like you," she said. "I'll be very glad to trust you!"

"Then do one thing—and do not tell Miss Reardon. Somehow you get Arthur to walk with you, to-night at ten o'clock. Go down to the gate which separates these two plantations. I'll be there."

"Oh!" she cried with a little catch of breath. "You won't—*fight?*"

"No," he said with grim humor, "I'll have a revolver!"

Maxine could not fathom that, but she saw his half smile. "All right!" she agreed impulsively.

And a moment later three old-line Southerners nearly fell from their chairs. Mrs. Marriott, indeed, dropped her empty wineglass with a little crash. Maxine Marriott, *their* stand-offish, patrician Maxine, came strolling along into the morning room, her arm inter-

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twined with that of the terrible, outrageous Cajan!

CHAPTER VI.

BONDAGE.

EARLY that afternoon Julius went to Selma. There he found a harness-maker, and bought a money belt. Then he went to the bank, closed his account and took the money in gold pieces. When he returned home he saw to it that the new roadster he had been driving was refueled completely, and that an extra can of gasoline was ready in the rumble seat.

The rest of the afternoon he spent writing brief letters of farewell to his tutors and Colonel Burdett. The gist of his letter to the colonel was simply that at heart he felt himself a Cajan, and could not go on masquerading as anything else. There were heartfelt thanks, of course, but these did not matter much to Julius himself. He meant to show his true feeling in a far more substantial way.

That evening he dressed in a hunting suit he had never worn. This, with boots, cap and a Lüger pistol of which he had become fond, was all except a musette bag containing underwear, socks, shirts and incidentals. Tied to the outside of the buckled bag, however, were four strange objects: large, soft boxing gloves — the ten-ounce "pillow" variety he had used during the course of his boxing instruction.

This material was tossed into the back of the roadster, beside the gas can. Then Julius drove out, and turned down the private road which linked the two estates. He reached the gate at precisely nine thirty, turned the car about, then vaulted the gate and reconnoitered for a few moments on the other side, picking out a spot where the moonlight did not reach. There he quietly leaned against a tree and waited.

The last time he looked at the illuminated dial of his wrist watch the hands said five minutes of ten. Almost immediately he heard a murmur of approaching voices. Maxine was prompt.

The Cajan's lips narrowed to a line as he listened. The voice of Arthur was hoarse and burring. It was evident that he had been drinking to dull the ignominy of that scene in the morning, and was in an ugly mood. Julius heard Maxine protesting against something—he could readily guess what—and his right hand tightened over the butt of the empty Lüger.

"Hands up!" he cried gruffly, stepping out in theatrical fashion and flourishing the Lüger. Naturally he had not the slightest intention in the world of using it, but a deep contempt for Arthur made him believe that mere sight of a weapon would turn that young fellow into a limp jelly.

In that he was a little wrong. Even if Arthur had been completely sober he would not have flinched from physical fear. Half-drunk as he was he only laughed scornfully.

"Oh, it's you!" he derided. "No mask, either! What d'you s'pose, Maxie, has the guv'nor begun to get stingy with his new little sonlet? So the boy has to go out and pick pockets and hold up people?"

"Put up your hands!" commanded the Cajan in as hoarse and menacing a voice as he could summon.

"Oh, go to hell!" snarled Arthur.

IN spite of herself a convulsive, half-hysterical laugh came from Maxine. Arthur had started to speak again, but stopped abruptly, scowled—thinking, no doubt, this was

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derision—and suddenly lunged for the Cajan.

He had no chance, whatever, even though Julius merely lifted the pistol out of reach of his grasping hand. The Cajan now was a fairly well trained boxer. As his right arm raised, his eyes remained upon the point of Arthur's weak chin. Left fist came up jarringly, connecting to perfection with the button. Arthur collapsed into the roadway, completely unconscious.

"Sorry I had to do it—didn't think he had the nerve," said Julius. "Now I'll have to truss him up." He brought four fish-stringers from one of the eight pockets of his coat.

Maxine said nothing. Her eyes were serious as she saw the youth to whom she was still nominally engaged bundled into the front seat of the roadster. Then Julius walked back to her.

"Some day he'll come back to you—a man!" he said with sincere emphasis.

She took a deep breath. "Wh-where are you going?" she asked, placing one small hand on his heavily muscled arm.

"That I won't tell even you," he said gently. "Probably every one will guess, but it is just as well that *you* do not know!"

"I think I see," she answered in a low voice, then started forward as without another word he vaulted into the driver's seat. "But, Julius! *You* will come back, too?" There was sudden, quick anxiety in this. Perhaps she really fathomed a little of this strange man.

Slowly he shook his head. "Never," he replied, a deep melancholy in his tone. "The unhappiness goes with me. There let it stay! Good-by—Maxine!"

The ways of women are peculiar. Maxine waited until the receding red tail-light of the car dissolved in the tears which sprang to her eyes. Then she slowly sat down there at the side of the road, and wept for a man she had seen but twice. She did not even notice when a toad leaped into her lap.

ARTHUR suffered on that journey south, but he got no sympathy whatever. He stayed bound. The only variation was that after daylight came he was gagged as well, and half-smothered under the Cajan's raincoat every time one of the small villages came in sight. On the west side of the Alabama River there were not many of these.

Julius had his own troubles finding the way. Despite the latest road map, he had to desert the car and twice go on foot to ask directions. Then, as they progressed in the forest silence, he began to recognize landmarks. Cajan country! He turned out into one of the faint ox-cart roads, the very one the commissary guide had shown to Colonel Burdett seventeen months before. And now, peering sharply to left and right as well as ahead, Julius drove as silently as possible. None knew better than he that every thousand yards forward represented a real peril of blasting buckshot fired from ambush.

He finally decided not to chance it further. He could make himself known—a necessary procedure in view of his khaki hunting suit. After that the car and all could be taken care of easily enough.

Getting out, he cupped his hand and sent a high-pitched, weirdly ululating call echoing through the damp, chilly aisles of forest. In the car Arthur, who for a long time had lain and bumped around inertly, straightened, and a hoarse exclamation came from his lips.

Julius repeated the call, and then turned back. His face was grimly se-

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rious. The Lüger pistol, loaded now, was thrust through his belt.

"I suppose you are beginning to realize that I am in earnest," he said. "I am going to release you. First, though, I want to tell you something about where you are. This is Cajan forest. None of your people, and only a few blacks, are tolerated here. As my prisoner, my slave if you want to call it that, you will continue to live—just as long as I say!"

"Oh, go to hell!" croaked Arthur. He had looked up all he could find in libraries concerning Cajans, however, and had seen enough of this grimly efficient young man, so his defiance was feeble.

What this kidnaping could portend he failed to guess; but the burning resolve for blood vengeance was rooted in him. It looked as though he would have to bide his time; but when that time *did* come! Unutterable things finished his train of thought.

Julius ignored the retort. He locked the roadster and thrust away the key. Then he repeated the weird cry, one used by his people since time immemorial.

"Cajans will come," he said briefly. "If you value your worthless carcass, do exactly as you are told!"

With that he unbound Arthur's wrists and ankles, rolling up the fish stringers for further use. "No, stay right there in the car!" he added, as Arthur, numb and almost dead from lack of liquor and the fatigue of the journey, would have stumbled forth into the palmetto.

AGAIN and again the call was sounded. About an hour later Julius detected the moving plume of a blackjack sapling, and knew that round about the car now there were hidden Cajans. He gave the cry one final time, then supplemented it by announcing:

"I am Jules LeFevre!" he announced in a stentorian voice. "I have been a prisoner, and now I return bringing a slave!" All this was in the singsong of Cajan jargon, incomprehensible to Arthur.

The sight of nine barefooted men, each carrying a shotgun, emerging cautiously from the almost impenetrable anise and laurel underbrush, staring at him distrustfully, looking Julius himself up and down before admitting his identity, was impressive enough to Arthur, however.

The newcomers stared at the machine, and there was no doubt they disapproved of it. One, Bombazanne, who had been bully and king of the woods until his death a few years back, had told them that when cars made their way into the Cajan fastness, that last refuge of the harried folk would be taken from them.

Arthur looked at the Cajans and shuddered. They were all lean, and except for one probably congenital cripple whose shoulder hitched as he walked, all were well above medium height.

One huge, round-shouldered brute with buck teeth stood a full six inches over six feet. And his black eyes, like those of the cotton-mouth moccasin, seemed to have no pupils.

Five of the men might well have been handsome, except for their garb and the unkempt condition of their hair and beards. One of them, whose black hair was touched queerly with streaks of white, resembled Julius. He it was—the third elder brother of the Cajan, in fact—who first broke into voluble speech, recognizing Julius and asking a rapid-fire of questions which

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would have required half a day to answer in full.

Once Julius might have gabbled as volubly. Now he handled matters in far different fashion. He treated the truth cavalierly, explaining how he had been lured away far to the north and there kept in captivity by strange men who dressed as he now was clad, and who lived in great castles and châteaux with many retainers. (This was partially understandable to the Cajans, because of traditions of Old France now become much like fairy tales, handed down from generation to generation.)

He had finally managed to escape, and had brought one prisoner, the youth in the car. This captive now would have to work for him, since Julius announced his intention of making a home, clearing land, then tilling it after a new fashion which would make fifteen bushels of corn grow on one acre.

He carefully did not exaggerate, as even this amount sounded incredible to the ragged Cajans.

There was much more talk, and then Julius—foreseeing that he would have to establish himself as a fighter in order to win the hearing ordinarily accorded only older men—boasted of his prowess. He issued a challenge to any woods bully who might wish to put him to the test. He knew there would be several in the course of the next few days, and grimly decided that he would take them as painlessly as possible. The very life of Arthur might depend upon his prowess.

After what seemed an interminable time to the captive, Julius turned to him.

"Go along with these men. Do as you are told. I will see you again in a couple of hours," he commanded. And then a moment later he started the car, driving it away to a place of concealment.

CHAPTER VII.

"FIGHT YOURSELF FREE!"

THERE was no scientific tapering off for Arthur Jones. The next three days would remain a hideous nightmare for him as long as he lived. Julius proved an implacable captor. He had Arthur taken to a deserted cabin set amid five partially cleared acres, on the edge of which a creek branch wandered through dense forest.

At the cabin Julius gave him two blankets to spread on the rotting board floor. Around one of the logs of the wall was fastened a chain with inch links. At the end of the chain was a handcuff, once taken from the body of an over-enterprising Prohibition agent. Inside the handcuff was the left wrist of Arthur Jones.

A quart tin cup of cold water was refilled as often as Arthur emptied it. Cabbage and side meat, with corn bread twice a day, were furnished on a tin plate. There were no utensils. Each morning a cup of chicory concoction purporting to be coffee was given him.

And for the rest of it, Arthur was left alone. Though he did not know it and never would hear, another fight for his life or sanity was going on outside.

Some of the Cajans, as Julius had foreseen, brooded over deaths from the guns of misguided tax-gatherers or liquor agents. Nothing would have pleased them more than to have taken the excuse of Julius's story to rend the captive limb from limb. Also, several of the aggrieved parties fancied their

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fighting abilities. Four publicly accepted the thrown gage; and the tacit prize was Arthur, as well as supremacy in the woods.

Before a small handful of spectators Julius met two of the bullies the next morning after his arrival. In neither case was there any real fight. The Cajans came at him according to their nature, the first one swaying, arms outstretched, looking for a diving tackle or a neck hold. One straight right to the chin finished him.

The second was cagier. He ducked, dodged, taking a tattoo of blows which did not quite connect, almost getting a hold, then succumbing to a crushing blow with a ghastly grunt. The punch had discovered for him something he had never suspected in himself, a nerve ganglion known as the solar plexus.

Next day there were two more challengers, and nearly one hundred eager spectators—among them, undoubtedly, as matters turned out, a few more men who wanted a look at this new prodigy before challenging him. The woods telegraph had spoken of his peculiar use of the hands, one never before seen in the reaches of the piney woods.

One of these second men to come, actually did get his hands on Julius, fell and rolled, inflicting some damage before the Cajan boxer could wrench free, leap to his feet, and then stop a second, blinder rush with two smashing punches.

The crowd roared. Like all crowds it was ready to be friends with a new champion. But there was one more man to reckon with—an oldish, squat fellow with enormous chest, arms that reached close to his knees, and an evil cunning in his half-hidden eyes. This was Jakes Boloo (doubtless once Jacques Beaulieu), who had traveled seventeen miles to see the conflict.

Jakes challenged, wanting to fight immediately. But Julius shook his head. His right eye had been rasped, and now ran water with a little blood. He explained, and set a date for next day. The crowd backed him up, much to Jakes's disgust. The tough old one undoubtedly would have preferred an antagonist worn from two previous combats. Next morning, at the same place, was agreed.

JULIUS did not think much about another fight, one way or another. His brain was concerned just then with the pitiable half-madman chained up there in the cabin. By now he must have worn himself out, reached dulled exhaustion. It would be good to get him outdoors in the sun again.

This proved to be the case. Arthur was filthy, sunk in apathy, a dismal wreck of the still spirited fellow he had been while sustained by stimulants. Julius unchained him next morning and made him follow.

"I have a fight on my hands," said Julius, not explaining. "You may watch."

So Arthur, staggering from weakness and a suffocated sense of unreality, went out into a glade in the woods. There he sat down, a little apart from what seemed a huge crowd of Cajan men, who gabbled and chattered in a way that made his head reel. He was free now, but for the time being he had not spirit enough to think of running away.

Naked to the waist, Jakes Boloo and Julius faced each other. Both were barefooted. Arthur stared unbelievingly at the apelike figure of Jakes, and shivered. The man's torso was scarred in a dozen places that showed even through the matted hair. What was it all about? Fortunately Arthur did not

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guess, though the grinning, half-calculating faces of some of the Cajan watchers might have given him a hint.

A shotgun roared. The fight began. This time Julius changed his tactics. He knew of this old woods-terror, a fighter said to have killed his opponents on several occasions. Julius went immediately into an attack. He danced in, planting long-range lefts to Jakes's countenance—only on the third blow to have his wrist caught, wrenched, and nearly torn from the rest of his arm!

With difficulty he got free, just before those huge arms gripped. And then with a sidewise swaying like that of a giant orang Jakes pursued. He did not waste an instant. He seemed to grab with his left hand, then suddenly leaped in the air, bringing his huge foot and ankle around in the savage hitch-kick of *savate!*

The unexpected blow landed almost squarely. Julius was going forward, aiming a smash at the flattened, ugly face before him. The kick hit a little high, but on his forehead, and the ground rushed up to smite him a second time. Dazed, he still had sense enough to roll.

A hand reached for him half blindly. A savage curse burst from the throat of Jakes. He had been struck on the bridge of his flat nose, and both eyes were well-nigh useless. Still he knew that his enemy was down, and this was the chance to seize and tear him to tatters.

Once, twice he grabbed, not quite trusting his eyesight for a leap to the ground on top of his opponent; and then Julius was up, knees wabbling, striving to get a grip on his reeling brain, to duck, avoid this hairy monster for just that precious few seconds.

Some of the clinch tactics and sidesteps came to him automatically. Half a dozen times Jakes almost got him. The big man was snarling with rage now. His eyes had cleared, but in the meantime Julius had recovered in great measure. The giant did not know. He finally spread his arms embracingly, and rushed.

Julius set himself. He had to stop Jakes with this punch or go down for good. Straight from the shoulder it went, with all his strength. It hit Jakes squarely in the center of his heavy neck. There was a guttural squawk, then the impact of two more punches.

Jakes stopped, his black eyes bugging outward. Additional blows would not matter. He had been knocked unconscious on his feet; and in two seconds more he fell, like a turpentine barrel rolling down from a platform.

"BUT—but I can't fight *you!*" Arthur and his implacable captor were a quarter of a mile from the scene of the battle with Jakes, and Julius was tendering his prisoner a pair of boxing gloves.

"You only think you can't!" said Julius grimly. "I'll tell you right now, you're going to fight me every day! At first I'll be easy with you, and teach you everything I know as we go along. This will be your chance. I don't intend to kill you, or even mutilate you; but you'll either fight or take a beating with a switch, every day!"

"But why?" bleated Arthur, thoroughly unnerved. "Why, for God's sake?"

"Well," snapped Julius, "I've promised myself I'm going to make *something* of you! Just what it will be I don't know—yet. But I'm going to find out. There's good cold water down there. You'll have a plunge when we get through.

"Now look here, Arthur Burdett!

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Put on those gloves! Try to be a man again! I promise you this. The time you lick me fairly I'll tell you where I have hidden the keys to your father's roadster! You will be free then to go! Fight yourself free!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SEED TAKES ROOT.

THOSE first eight or ten boxing workouts with the big gloves were pretty sad affairs. Arthur was as weak as a wet rag. He wept, but still he tried to smash the grinning devil who danced in front, encouraging, taunting. He tried until his arms dropped from exhaustion. Always then Julius put into play the swipe methods he had learned from the Tia Juana Kid, following these by an icy plunge into the creek. And the heroic treatment began to succeed.

They did no roadwork, but there were other things just as strenuous. First there was the cabin to be cleaned out and repaired. Then certain tools arrived, and Julius set himself and his captive to the long-drawn labor of really clearing the five-acre patch. This was going to be a model farm and orchard, and these two alone were going to make it so!

Day by day they dug, hauled, burned, working from the time the morning boxing and plunge were over until sundown. Boxes and cans, mysteriously purchased with the gold brought by Julius, appeared. These contained food which better suited Arthur's taste and stomach than the rough victuals of the Cajans. With plenty of razorback hog meat, and plenty of piney-woods beef —these animals range wild in the woods—Arthur began to develop an appetite.

At first he saw his slavery as nothing but unadulterated horror, and schemed in every way to get a chance to kill Julius. Naturally he came to use tools in the clearing operations, and three times he suddenly attacked the Cajan.

Each time Julius managed to dodge, wrest away the weapon—after which he calmly beat Arthur into unconsciousness. It was brutal but seemed necessary, until on the fourth occasion—this a blow with a keen ax which missed by less than a foot—Julius had an idea.

"See here!" he said. "Back in your former life you called yourself a gentleman. You really weren't, but that doesn't make any difference. You probably wouldn't lie, would you?"

"No I wouldn't, damn you!" was the sullen retort.

"Well then, give me your word of honor that you won't attack me again, and I'll leave you unchained at night. You can't possibly escape, unless you go in the car, anyway."

Arthur had an idea he might find the car sometime—and of course he could make an ignition connection around any puny dash lock. Still he was not hasty in promising.

"I'll think it over," he said sullenly.

A week later most of the ache had left his bones. He found to his astonishment that he did not miss liquor; and he caught himself fingering biceps muscles which were pushing hard against his shirt. He had begun to enjoy secretly those early morning rounds with the gloves, and the incredibly cold plunge afterward.

Of course, in spite of the extra pounds he had over the Cajan, he never could hope to beat him in a fight. That seemed certain. Still, he admitted to himself, the outrageous brute was more of a gentleman with the gloves on than without. He never extended himself,

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never hit too hard. Every time Arthur finished, sometimes practicing blows over and over until he could manage them, the Cajan gave him one of those blessed rubdowns and then threw him into the creek. Lord, how strong the woodsman was!

On the morning which began his fourth week in the piney woods, Arthur came voluntarily and pledged his word of honor not to attack Julius.

The Cajan flashed a smile. "Fine!" he said, and clapped Arthur on the back. "Say, d'you realize this is the last week we spend in clearing? I've sent down for everything we'll need for our orchard, our cornfield and our truck garden!"

The magic in that little word—*our!* Though he certainly had no intention of doing so, that day Arthur Burdett did half again as much work as he ever had performed in a day before.

SIX nights later Arthur made a bid for freedom. No one stopped him. Twelve hours later, completely lost, he was beckoned back by the Cajan who had trailed him. Arthur had not found the car, and now realized that even if he did find it the only way he ever would blunder a way out of this maze of faint wood roads would be by sheer trial and error, which takes time.

Julius did not mention the incident. Planting was on, and this labor, dull to watch, somehow instills enthusiasm into the dullest clod of a fellow. Day after day, week after week they worked, first at actual planting, then as February waned, with cultivating what had been sown.

Little by little from then on, in the boxing, Julius began to set a faster pace. Arthur had had six weeks or so of instruction while in private academy. This had helped. Now he had really grown strong, and the boxing every morning had prevented heavy work from slowing him. He ate like a horse, and since his natural weight was from fifteen to twenty pounds greater than that of the Cajan, he filled it out with muscle.

Julius regarded him thoughtfully day by day. He, too, had come to know that Arthur never would win in a ring battle against himself, but he had other plans. As their crops came above the ground and grew in profuse, orderly beauty, so he tried to instill courage and self-confidence in his captive.

It worked—up to a certain point. It is probable that there Arthur Burdett reached the greatest boxing skill of which he was capable. Some men do just that. His nose was a little flatter, his neck size sixteen instead of fourteen, and his weight one hundred and seventy pounds of bone and muscle. But for some reason he was relatively slow. Julius could have hit him thrice for every punch he started.

A month went by. The radishes and lettuce were gathered and sent to market in Citronelle. And the tomato vines were climbing up luxuriantly. Even the corn was ankle high.

Arthur did not improve his boxing. Julius at last recognized the fact, and started, ever so carefully, to make it appear otherwise. He missed. He pulled his punches a little. He left partial openings, letting Arthur almost catch him napping. Almost. Some time Arthur would succeed . . .

This did stimulate the captive. He tried with all his might to break Julius's guard, morning after morning.

"I'll get you yet!" he promised grimly.

"When you do—good-by!" said Julius seriously. "You remember I

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told you when you licked me you could have the keys to the car? Well, that time is not far off, I can see. Probably you will have to crank the car. The battery must be dead by now, but the magneto..."

Arthur suddenly looked blank. Watching, Julius saw him wander aimlessly away, scratching his head. A little later Julius saw him out, walking down the rows of growing corn, doing absolutely nothing. The Cajan chuckled. This was finer success than even he had planned! Arthur actually was going to *hate to leave* the crop he had started with his own hands!

Julius reached for a packet of letter paper, and uncapped a stylographic pen. Then he wrote a careful, rather stilted letter to a man he loved. His eyes shone.

CHAPTER IX.

KNOCK-OUT.

TOM-HARRY set down a small tray at Colonel Burdett's elbow. The colonel was seated near a window looking eastward across a dried-up cottonfield not yet plowed under. The cotton looked like a miniature barbed-wire entanglement.

The white-haired man did not move, did not see the single letter that had come by the afternoon mail. The old man looked much older. For months he had done nothing at all but wait—and there was nothing at all this side of eternity for which he waited.

He did not even turn as he groped around to the tall glass in which cube ice and a sprig of fresh mint were swimming. He picked up the glass, sipped moodily.

Minutes later he turned wearily to set down the glass. Then without interest he picked up the envelope, and looked at it front and back. There seemed to be nothing of importance here. He put it back on the tray, but did not take his fingers away. A minute later, wearily, he took it up, slowly tore off the end, and drew out the folded sheet within. He read:

DEAR COLONEL BURDETT:

In a few days I am going to send back your real son to you. Arthur has conquered the liquor foolishness completely. He is brown of skin, hard as nails, and weighs twenty pounds more than I do. He is getting so good with his fists that I'm afraid I can't handle him any longer.

I know he loves you. Give him his chance, and I'll guarantee you'll have a son of whom you will be forever proud.

Respectfully, with my love,

JULIUS.

Slowly, shaking in every muscle, Colonel Burdett rose from the chair. Both fists were tightly clenched, one still holding the letter up before his eyes.

He took half a dozen steps blindly forward, executed a military about-face, and then—

Well, Colonel Burdett may not have been quite old enough to have learned the Rebel Yell under Pickett at Gettysburg, but he gave a creditable imitation nevertheless, raising both arms toward the ceiling!

Even deaf-and-dumb Tom-Harry heard it from the next room, and came running in terror, making his *ungg-a* noise of fright. And the housekeeper, and the footman, and—

"*Arthur's coming back!*"

Perhaps just then they did not know whether to be glad or sorry, but there was no doubt about Colonel Burdett. Give his boy another chance? Hell and damnation! Let his boy give *him* another chance!

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He shooed them all back now, and grabbed up the telephone. An astounded central who knew him, heard him swear before a woman for the first time in his life, and was shocked into giving him the right number—that of the plantation home of his old friend, Bellamy Marriott.

As it chanced, neither Bellamy nor his wife was at home this afternoon. Maxine, home for Easter, answered, and for some moments had a hard time making head or tail out of what the old man was shouting.

"No, I can't read it!" he denied. "My voice—my eyes are bad—I—damn it—pardon me, I just mean that Julius writes that Arthur is well, and is coming back!"

"Oooo! And with Julius?"

"What? Well, I—I don't know. Let me see—"

But Maxine Marriott would not wait. "You just hold on to that letter!" she cried. "I know where they are. I'm coming right over now. If it doesn't say they're *both* coming, why, dammit, I'm going *down* after them myself!"

That really calmed down the colonel. It was the first time in his life he had ever heard a white woman swear.

OWING to the fact that he was forced to make the trip with two girls—Constance Reardon insisted on their coming by way of Montgomery and picking her up—Colonel Burdett was forced to spend another night at the Hotel Citronelle. This gave him a chance to arrange for the same guide from the commissary, however.

That lank young man looked at him in a puzzled way.

"Sa-ay, colonel!" he drawled. "That young Cajan you want to see again—he's been raisin' merry hell down thisaway! Reckon he's brought me twice as much business in plows an' seed an' everything—"

"My son, you mean?"

"We-l-l, I wouldn't go for to say. He's callin' himself Jules LeFevre again. But I do hear there's a young chap there name of Burdett—"

"They are *both* my sons!" said the colonel, turning on his heel.

It was chilly and still dark in the wood aisles at seven-thirty that morning. Sweater-clad, Arthur and Julius trotted a quarter mile out, then back to the creek for their boxing. Julius noted now that Arthur led the way. There was determination in his bearing, aggressiveness. His wind was excellent, too.

When they stopped to reach down the tin box from the tree crotch, and bring out the gloves—fixed now with elastic bands at the wrists instead of laces—the white vapor of his breathing came deeply and regularly.

"Feel some better than that day you came to visit, don't you?" asked Julius.

Arthur did not reply. He was drawing on his pillows. "Let's see all you've got, for once!" he challenged. "I don't give a damn if you hand me a knockout!"

Down inside of him Julius smiled. He knew that would never do. Even with only a little more than one hundred and fifty pounds to match against the burlier youth's one seventy, he could have dazzled Arthur with speed and knocked him kicking inside three minutes.

Spirit, not boxing ability, was the question. Had Arthur tight enough hold on his manhood to conquer when once again he faced the outside world? Because he feared even the decent-

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hearted deception he planned—one which could not be kept up without discovery—Julius had determined to chance the throw with dice that controlled the fates of three and probably more people for whom he cared.

"I'm sorry for your father," said Julius, mentioning the colonel for the first time since their arrival. "He's getting pretty old. I'll bet he's lonesome—"

"Will you shut up?" savagely interrupted Arthur, leading with his left, then coming in with both arms pumping piston blows to the body. He did not clinch, and threw aside the warding arms of Julius. He was angry.

For thirty seconds Julius guarded, returning light counter blows. He did not wish to tire Arthur—not this particular morning. So he seemed to slip on the leaves and needles underfoot, and one of Arthur's blows came through only partially guarded. And it really stung!

That punch, the first one Arthur ever had scored to know it—more than accidental touches here and there—seemed to daze the Cajan. For a moment his guard lowered.

Arthur was at him madly. One-two—one-two—and *landing!* Julius backed, endeavoring to cover. He dodged, slipped again, and a hook caught him on the side of the head. Again and again he strove to get away but he was weakening visibly. Arthur charged in, the incredible possibility of victory thrilling him to his toes!

Then it happened. Julius staggered. Quick as he could throw a glove Arthur poked a straight left to the stomach, then leaped forward as the Cajan's guard dropped. A right cross, sent to the side of the chin with every ounce of his burly shoulder-strength, crashed straight to its mark, with a sound like that of a heavy wire beater hitting a sodden rug!

More completely knocked out than even he had imagined possible, Julius pitched face forward to a clump of palmetto fans and lay still.

WHILE he was yanking off his gloves, Arthur's face worked strangely. Unbelief, triumph, and a sort of horror struggled there for mastery. He had won! He was free!

He knew now where the car was hidden. He also knew that Julius kept the ring with the two keys in the watch pocket of his trousers. But what should he do? According to agreement, which the Cajan would keep to the letter, he had won freedom. He could resuscitate Julius—or he could kill him! Many weeks there had been when Arthur would have slain his captor and gambled his own life in so doing, thinking nothing of the hazard.

But somehow desire for vengeance had evaporated completely. Arthur knew full well that this man had been his friend—the best friend he had ever had in his life. Now he rolled him over, got the keys—and stared long at the half-open eyes, the twisted jaw.

Then with a peculiar noise—that might have been a sob, or almost anything—Arthur reached down roughly, seized the Cajan's thighs, lifted them to his right shoulder, heaved, staggered erect, and then weaved a way down and through the creek ford, to the lean-to and the roadster. Dumping Julius in the front seat, he turned and dashed back to the cabin. There he seized a few articles, threw them in the musette, got the Lüger pistol, the money belt of Julius, and the accursed fish-stringer cords. With these and a raincoat and blankets, he hurried back to the roadster. Julius had not stirred. He did

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not even move as the fish-stringers bit into his wrists and ankles.

IN the six weeks which had elapsed since his abortive attempt at escape. Arthur had learned other things besides the hiding place of the car and the keys. Driving now, he knew that Citronelle lay in a general southeasterly direction, and that the sand-rutted highway thereto was almost directly west.

So he followed a wood road, turning here, turning there, but keeping the morning sun at his back. And as he sought the highway, a big limousine came from Citronelle, p l o u g h i n g through the deep sand, nearing the same road from which the roadster would emerge.

They met where two cars could not pass. They stopped, radiators no more than ten feet apart. And for the space of three seconds not a person moved. It was too incredible! Then came the rather shrill cry of Connie Reardon.

"Arthur!"

And with that she was out, running to meet him. What she thought of the unshorn, bronzed, bearded man who came out to the sand, bowing a little stiffly to her, is hard to tell. Certain it is that Connie's wide eyes rested upon an Arthur Burdett whom she never before could have imagined. Perhaps she had believed in him all along.

A white-faced Colonel Burdett was out on one side of the car now, and Maxine Marriott on the other. The colonel seemed to be having difficulty finding any words at all.

"I licked him finally," Arthur said, nodding back toward the car. "He gave me a—a chance to make a man of myself. He's pure gold, colonel. I was bringing him back to you. Something he said once made me think he would not have gone, under his own power—"

"What have you done to him?"

This was Maxine Marriott, who had run on to the roadster. She was staring in horror down at the twisted, bearded face of the Cajan. Still completely out, he lay where he had been tossed by the bouncing of the car.

"Oh—that," said Arthur vaguely. He came over, looked. "Oh, that's nothing. Just a dislocated jaw. He did it to me a half dozen times. Here."

He reached over, seized the chin firmly, and yanked. There was a dull sound like a muffled click.

"There," said Arthur. "He's just in dreamland. He'll snap out of it soon. As I was saying, Colonel Burdett—"

"Oh! I think you're all a bunch of damn brutes!" cried Maxine half hysterically. She opened the door, slid under the wheel, and in a moment the head of the sleeping man was caught fiercely to her breast.

"My son!" said Colonel Burdett huskily. He placed one arm around Arthur's shoulders. The youth stiffened, but suddenly crowded close. His arm went about his father's waist.

"I'll be a man, dad!" he whispered. "But Julius—?"

THE colonel stepped slowly ahead. He saw that the Cajan's eyes were open now; but Maxine, crimson of cheek but defiant, had not altered her position. She glared at them.

"How are you feeling, Julius, my son?" asked the colonel, reaching over with his right hand to clasp the Cajan's hand in Maxine's lap.

Slowly Julius looked from one to the other. A faint smile came to his lips, a smile with sadness in it, however.

"Fine, colonel," he said. "Con-

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gratulations—to you both. Arthur is a real man, worthy of his father."

"And that you have always been! I was blind to my blessings, Julius."

"But now—" Julius struggled, and sat erect. "Now—oh, I must say good-by. Thank you, dear Maxine, I—I—" He stopped. The look on her face was too much.

"Do you love me?" This was her astounding question. Even Connie gasped. "You—" But she smiled. She knew.

"I—oh, my dear!" cried Julius. "I am Cajan!" He tried to get up, but she seized him.

"Don't mind us, you others!" she snapped. "I've found my man! If he insists on being Cajan, why—why—you can just go along! I'll be Cajan too!"

Over there on the front seat of the limousine a rather humorous looking youth from Citronelle rattled a pair of dice under the nose of Joe, the colored chauffeur.

"I got some change in my pants," said the guide with a drawl that concealed the thrill he felt. "We ain't goin' to be needed here for a while. What say we stroll up the road a couple of quarters, and roll the bones?"

THE END.

A One-Man Mutiny

THE U. S. S. Constitution, "Old Ironsides," has witnessed many deeds of daring and valor. One of the most unusual of these was the Marine Corps' famous one-man mutiny. One morning in 1812, Commodore William Bainbridge, who commanded "Old Ironsides," ordered a private Marine to the gratings, there to be flogged. The man's offense was slight—he had merely carried out the instructions of his immediate superior, First Lieutenant John Coutee, U. S. M. C.—but flogging was the usual punishment of the era.

Bainbridge came forward to witness the brutal act, but Coutee protested vigorously. His was the fault, he said. But the commodore was adamant. The flogging must be inflicted.

In answer Coutee dashed his sword on the deck with this declaration, "I am no longer an officer of this ship. My resignation takes place immediately." The country was at war and the act tantamount to mutiny.

Bainbridge remained calm, and, telling the lieutenant to pick up his sword, turned on his heel and went to his cabin. An hour later he sent for Coutee, who was soon seen with the sword again belted to his waist. The commodore, instead of preferring charges and having the young officer cashiered, had made him see his error, because, as Bainbridge said, "An officer who would risk his career to save an enlisted man is too valuable for the U. S. Navy to lose."

Coutee resigned later and met Commodore Bainbridge one day in the crowded lobby of a Baltimore hotel. The famous sea fighter thrust out his hand and greeted his former subordinate with: "Why, here's my little fighting cock who dared me on my own quarter deck. But he did it to spare a private Marine what he believed to be unjust punishment." *C. A. Freeman.*

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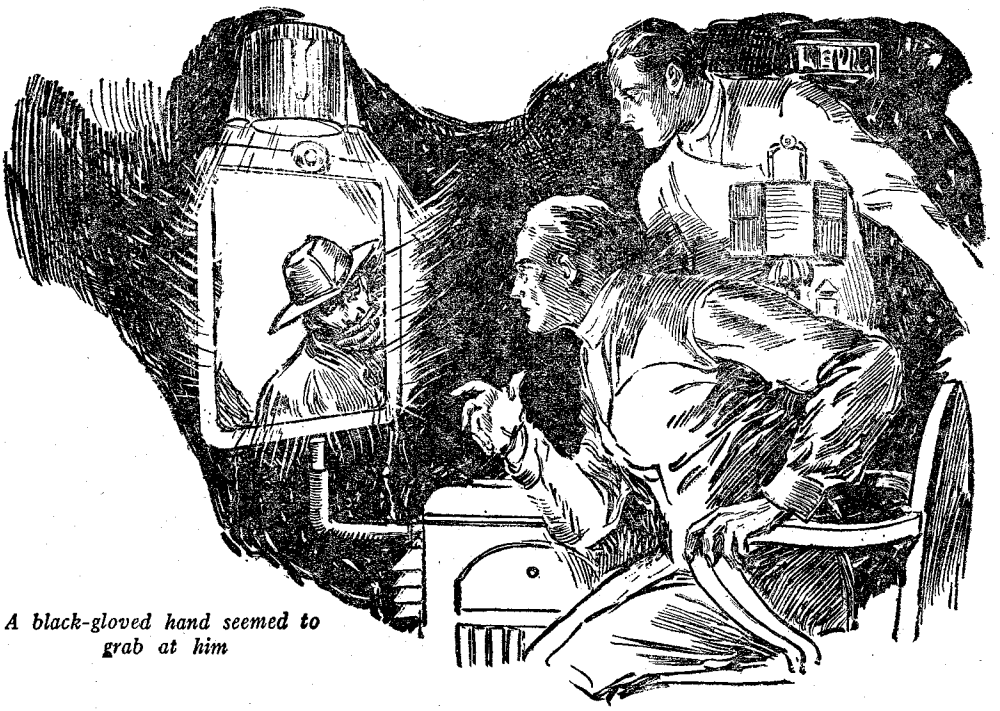

A black-gloved hand seemed to grab at him

The Disappearance of William Roger

City Manager Roger of Great New York vanished on the eve of the 1981 audit—which put it up to detectives Baker and Dirk

By RAY CUMMINGS

"LOOK here," said Franklin Dirk, "you two had better be frank with me."

"We are," I insisted angrily. It was a new experience for me to be grilled by my own chief, as he and I had often grilled others. I looked at Beth Roger. She sat in the stiff upright chair of Dirk's office with her hands gripping its metal arms. Her dark eyes were fixed on Dirk as she echoed my words.

"It doesn't sound so," Dirk commented grimly. He was pacing the floor of the low metal room, with its dim tube-lights overhead, the audiphones on the desks and the door to the adjoining laboratory closed upon us. The Government Criminologist's office was insufferably hot this evening of June 5th, 1981. The single window was closed. Around us was the roaring city of Great New York. We were in the Mid-Manhattan section—near Street 42—but the clatter of the city reached us here as only a dim blended hum.

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Dirk suddenly stopped before Beth. "When did you first know your father had disappeared?"

"Just this afternoon, when it was made public."

The thing was making a tremendous stir. William Roger, City Manager, Chief Executive of Great New York, had inexplicably vanished upon the eve of the annual Federal Audit of his accounts. The whole city was ringing tonight with suspicion of political or private crookedness. There was as yet no police investigation, but Beth and I had at once appealed to Dirk. I was his assistant criminologist. But I was more directly involved in this case because I wanted to marry Beth Roger.

Dirk turned on me now. "Do you realize, Jac, that you can easily be suspected of complicity in this thing?"

"Good Lord, no!" I gasped at him. "But how—"

"If you two don't see that, you're more stupid than I think. Miss Beth, you only knew this afternoon that your father had disappeared? But he's been gone three days!"

"She doesn't live at home," I retorted.

Beth explained, "Four years ago mother died. A year afterward, father married again. With a stepmother as mistress of the house—"

Dirk nodded. "And you didn't get along with your stepmother? Tell me about her. I've heard—but tell me yourself."

"She was Clara Grayley—a television actress. Her people for generations back were circus performers. She and her brother George did acrobatic tricks—tight-rope walking, I think they called it—for a television broadcaster. Then my father married her—"

"How in the devil could you expect Beth to get along with a woman like that?" I interjected. "She's not much older than Beth—"

Dirk halted my impetuous outburst. "Miss Beth, you quarreled with your father and stepmother, and then left home to get a job?"

"I didn't quarrel with father—only with her. But he agreed with me I'd better leave. I visit him and Clara sometimes. Oh, I tried to like her—"

"Her damned brother George lives with them," I broke in. "He won't work—I don't suppose he could do anything anyway but walk tight ropes. He lives with them, sopping along on William Roger's generosity. How do you think Beth feels about that?"

A FAINT smile came to Dirk's thin lips. It was a strange experience having him turn his keen gray eyes upon me, when so often I had seen him flash them at others.

"I understand you don't know any of these people, Jac? Except Roger himself."

"No, and I don't want to."

"Then stop interrupting. Miss Beth, when did you see your father last?"

"About a week ago. I heard, this afternoon, the public reports that he was missing. I audiphoned Clara, and she confessed he's been missing three days. She and her brother—and Peter Clark, too, I think—have been looking for him. She seemed horribly upset—I couldn't get any details. I was so frightened myself, I didn't know what to ask. Then I got hold of Jac, and—"

"And you came to me," Dirk finished. "Quite so. You mentioned Peter Clark. Isn't he a news-gatherer of the American Press Broadcasting Company?"

"Yes," said Beth. "He's a friend of my stepmother's, and so—"

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"You want the facts," I exclaimed. "All right—she talks too slow! This Peter Clark was Clara Roger's former lover!"

"Jac!" Beth protested. "You don't know that for a fact."

"I know what you've always told me! Peter Clark wanted to marry this Grayley woman, but William Roger won her."

"Is that true?" Dirk demanded. He lifted his local audiphone sender. "Get me the history of Peter Clark—newsgatherer of American Press Broadcasting," he commanded of our outside office manager. "Particularly his relations, if any, with Clara Roger—when she was Clara Grayley."

He slammed up the instrument and came back at Beth.

"You think this Peter Clark is still in love with your stepmother, don't you?"

"I told you I don't know what to think," she retorted. "Clara always seems devoted to father—"

"I can answer that, chief," I interjected again. "Beth's father is comparatively rich, and Peter Clark is poor. So Clara Roger is not apt to be anything but a devoted wife!"

Dirk thought a moment. "Roger may just be hiding out, as the city thinks," he said finally. "But if he's been abducted—in the hands of criminals—any move I make to find him might bring him into additional danger. The average crook only commits murder when pushed, and I don't want to be the one to do the pushing. You, Miss Beth—did you tell your stepmother you were coming to me?"

"No! No, I didn't!" Her eyes had filled with sudden tears of alarm. She stood up, tall and slim in her gray flowing skirt and gray jacket. Her dark hair was straggling out of the little gray hat and over her forehead. She pushed it back.

I drew her down beside me. "Easy, Beth—take it easy; he'll be all right. We'll find him."

She sat clinging to me.

"Now for you, Jac," Dirk resumed abruptly. "What were your relations with William Roger?"

"I didn't know him very well. Beth introduced me to him. I've seen him two or three times."

"But never at his home?"

"No."

"And then you asked Roger's consent to marry his daughter?"

"I did, and he refused it. Said he preferred her to be of legal age before she decided whom to marry. That meant waiting a year."

"Did you quarrel with him, Jac?"

"No, I did not!"

"If he let Miss Beth marry now," Dirk went on, "her legal dowry from him would be some ten thousand dollars? Is that so?"

"And the same a year from now," I put in. "But Beth and I told him we are willing to waive the dowry."

"And still he refuses the consent! Sounds as if he didn't like you for a son-in-law."

Dirk's tall, thin figure towered over us. "As it happens, you two have a very good reason for wanting William Roger out of the way. Suppose in forty days he is still missing? If you broadcast now a demand for his consent to your marriage—and he doesn't answer that demand in Personal Relations Court—in forty days you'll get his consent by default, and ten thousand as dowry. I don't suppose you and Miss Beth ever thought of that, did you?"

He flung the question at us sarcastically.

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"But, chief," I protested, "we never thought of it! I haven't made any broadcast demand! I haven't ordered any!"

"I don't say you have. I'm showing you what an adverse lawyer could fasten on you."

"But if we never even realized—"

As though to give the lie to my words, the audiphone on Dirk's desk buzzed.

"A recent broadcast announcement you ought to hear," said the microphonic voice of our outside office attendant.

It came in a moment, repeated from the Echo Service.

> *"Demand for William Roger's parental consent to the marriage of his daughter is hereby made this June 5th, 1981, 7.32 P.M., to be broadcast by this service at this time daily for three days."*

I sat there frozen with breathless horror, and Beth swayed toward me, clinging to me.

"Jac, did you do this?" she gasped.

"No! Of course I didn't!"

I had not indeed; and I knew that Beth had not. But the public voice was now proclaiming it:

> *"Jac Baker hereby demands of William Roger, parental consent—and dowry of ten thousand gold dollars—"*

The damning broadcast was on the air! And I knew that within an hour the thoughts of the whole city would be turning toward me and Beth, wondering what we had to do with the disappearance of William Roger!

"LOOK there," said Dirk. "Every news-mirror in the city is loaded full of it to-night. There's another."

He and I were on our way to Roger's home, by monorail car speeding us north to the Westchester residential section of the city. We had left Beth at the office. The poor girl was prostrated by the shock.

The big news-mirror on the mid-level of Park Circle 20 was in a moment out of sight; but at the Harlem Esplanade there was another, with a crowd of at least a thousand before it. I caught a glimpse of the words:

> Government detective now in the Roger case. Jac Baker broadcasts demand upon Roger for consent to marry his daughter. Startling developments—

Our little single-seat car whirled us around a turn and the mirror was lost behind us.

"That's bad," said Dirk soberly. "We're publicly branded as being in the case, right from the start, in spite of our desire to act secretly."

"I'm prejudiced, I admit," I said. "I can't reason calmly on this affair. But you can. Do you think Roger is voluntarily hiding out?"

"No," he returned soberly. "I don't. He's no embezzler—I'd trust him with anything."

"Then he's held under duress. By whom? And why? What motive has any one for wanting him out of the way? Won't you discard Beth and me as—"

"Of course, Jac."

"Then who else?"

"I can't imagine," said Dirk. "We may be able to make a guess when we talk to his wife."

But almost at once it became obvious to me that we were going to learn very little from Clara Roger. I had never seen her before, and Dirk introduced me, not by name, but merely as his assistant.

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Clara Roger was either a very good actress, or else she really was—as she appeared to be—in total ignorance of her husband's whereabouts and thoroughly frightened for his safety. She received us in the somber-lighted luxurious living room on the upper floor of the residence which occupied a corner of the balconied block of houses, set with a garden of shrubs and flowers on top.

The three-leveled viaduct roared with traffic outside, but the window mufflers held out the noise. The dim room with its ornate padded metal furniture was cool and quiet—the height of modern city luxury. Clara Roger sat in an easy chair and told us, with trembling lips and frightened, tear-filled eyes, that she had not heard from her husband for three days. At about nine o'clock at night he had taken his small aëro-car to fly to his office—and he had never reached there.

She was a woman in her mid-twenties. Inclined now to be plump, with coiled and braided golden hair, mild blue eyes and a rosebud mouth. Without her present agitation undoubtedly she would be pretty. There was a theatrical look which still clung to her in spite of the three years she had been William Roger's wife.

The brother, George Grayley, was with her now. He was an athletic-looking man of some thirty-five, with black hair and a neat black mustache. He hardly spoke for the first ten minutes of Dirk's questioning of Mrs. Roger. Then he said abruptly, "Why the police get mixed in this, I'm damned if I see."

"But we're not the police, Mr. Grayley."

He shrugged. "Ain't it the same thing?"

At this mention of the police, Clara Roger was swept into sudden agitation. "Not the police!" she echoed. "Don't let them interfere!"

I think I have never seen such terror as her eyes held.

Grayley had been staring at me. "Say, by the way, is your name Jac Baker?"

My heart leaped. I had seen Grayley once before, but I did not think he knew me. Roger was not accustomed to discussing Beth's affairs with her stepmother.

"Yes," said Dirk quickly. "This is Jac Baker."

CLARA ROGER and her brother regarded me with new interest. The man laughed. "So this is the young detective Beth thinks she wants to marry? Well, let me tell you a few things... I heard that broadcast demand you and Beth made. It looks pretty queer to me—"

"He did not file that demand," Dirk put in. "We're trying to find out who did, and why. It was clever—too clever."

"So that's why you're in this," said Grayley. "To clear your assistant of complicity?"

Dirk stood up. "Perhaps. But family affairs should be kept out of this. Mr. Roger may be in danger. If professional criminals have abducted him—"

Clara Roger gave a low cry, and on her face was again that look of terror. Dirk gazed keenly at the woman who was seated in her chair, with her gaze on the floor and nervous fingers plucking at her dress. And he suddenly changed his tack.

"What has Peter Clark to do with this?" he demanded abruptly.

Mrs. Roger looked up with terror-stricken gaze. "Nothing," she stam-

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mered. "He—he offered to help—that's all."

Grayley strode over and fronted Dirk. He seemed about to add something to her statement. Then his gaze went to his sister, who was obviously upset. With veiled hostility he demanded, "Is this all you need of Mrs. Roger? This is all pretty hard on her." He seemed urging us to leave.

"Yes," said Dirk. "Good night, Mrs. Roger. I thank you."

"Good night," she said faintly; and as we left she was still huddled in her chair, staring at her feet.

Grayley followed us from the room. "Couldn't talk before her. I'm glad enough to have you do anything you can to help us find Roger. You mentioned this bird Clark. I don't want to make any charges, but it wouldn't hurt you to check up on him. That broadcasting racket, for instance." He turned to me. "You didn't order that, Baker?"

"I did not."

"Well—maybe Clark did. Ever think of that? He's in the same line of business—" He seemed wholly sincere now. "It happens I don't like Clark. My sister does—so let her. That's her business."

We paused just inside the front entrance of the house. Grayley lowered his voice. "For two days I've been tryin' to find out if Clark had anything to do with Roger's disappearance. I think I better not explain what motive he could have."

"We know that motive," said Dirk.

"You do? Well, all the better. But she's my sister—you keep her out of it! She's a good wife to Roger, but this fellow Clark—"

He opened the door for us. "That's all I'll say. Guess I've said too much anyway."

He closed the door after us and went back into the house.

WE headed across the esplanade and down the escalator steps to the lower monorail entrance. Dirk was pondering our next move. To me, the interview had been unsatisfactory. There seemed no possible way of getting on a tangible trail. But practically every case is like that. Dirk and I had learned that exhaustive theory and deduction don't lead you very far. You find a starting point, which is generally by chance—or by trial and error—and once you get going, one lead nearly always suggests another. But this affair seemed to have no possible starting trail; then it opened and went with a rush.

We had no sooner reached the viaduct than from a shadowed recess of the platform a man accosted us.

"Mr. Dirk?"

"Yes. I am Dirk."

The fellow was dressed in black, with a hat pulled down over his eyes. He edged us into the shadows away from the knot of passengers who were waiting for the car. He added:

"Are you—I suppose you are investigating this Roger affair?"

"I like to see with whom I'm talking," Dirk said, then reached suddenly and jerked the hat from the man's head. "Peter Clark!" he exclaimed.

I had never met Peter Clark, though I had heard a great deal of him from Beth. He was a solidly built fellow of thirty-odd, with sandy hair and pale blue eyes. He was obviously under stress now, furtive and hurried.

"What do you want?" Dirk demanded. "You taking this car? You go ahead."

"No! No, I'm staying here. Let it pass—take the next one."

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We let the car pass. Clark was plainly agitated. He cast swift glances about the now empty platform; and down the incline to the near-by front entrance of the Roger place.

"Mr. Dirk, are you—are you engaged to find Roger?"

"Why?" Dirk countered. "Would you like to print it as news? And cast it into the air?"

"No! I'm not here on business. I wanted you to know, if you mix up in this it may be very dangerous. You don't know what you're plunging into. That's why I wanted to warn you."

Dirk seized him by the coat. "What do you know about this affair?"

"I? Nothing. But the police mustn't get into it. I tell you there mustn't be any search. Not to-night—it's too dangerous . . . Stop holding onto me like that! I'm not—"

"Not mixed in this, Clark? But I guess you are. Four years ago, the records show you as being engaged to Clara Grayley."

Clark's jaw dropped. By the vacuum tube light on the platform parapet near us I could see his face go white.

Dirk went on. "She broke that engagement to marry William Roger."

"Well, I—what's that to do with anything? I'm trying to tell you not to mix in this. It might bring—bring death." He cast another swift glance toward Roger's house. "Don't you know there might be an electrical eavesdropper tuned on us even now?"

"There might, indeed," Dirk agreed.

"Where are you going now? To your office?" Clark demanded.

"My business is to ask questions," countered Dirk. "What's it to you?"

"I'm wondering where I can audiphone you later this evening."

"At our office," Dirk returned promptly.

Clark looked relieved. "Here comes your car. If I have anything I'll audiphone you."

He darted into the shadows and was gone. The monorail car came along.

DIRK whispered, "Over by those passengers, Jac! Quick! As if we were going to board it—"

We hastened down the platform, merged into a group of passengers crowding to get on and off, then darted back into a parapet shadow, and reached a side exit.

"Now," murmured Dirk. "Slip down along those shadows. Clark is around here, watching the Roger house, for some reason of his own. We'll see—"

We gained the lower level of the esplanade, and gazing up to the pedestrian trail of the viaduct we were startled to see Clara Roger emerge from the front door of her home, a trim figure in black and white as she stood for a moment gazing about her.

"This way, Jac! We've got to get up there!"

She seemed about to call a public aëro-car. We would lose her before we got near enough to follow. Dirk made a start for the upward incline, but halted at once and drew me into a shadow under a network of cables. Clark had appeared up there and accosted Mrs. Roger. The two had drawn behind a little light-tower and were standing seemingly in earnest conversation.

"Jac, tune in on them! See what you can do. This accursed noise—"

The traffic was roaring around us. I held the little listening ear of the microphonic eavesdropper before me, cut in the current and tried with my hands to shield the grid from the noise of the scurrying vehicles.

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There was nothing at first. With the eargrids in position I was nearly deafened by the traffic noises. Dirk was bent anxiously over me.

I caught Clara Roger's voice, a fragment "—at the bank. But, Peter dear—"

Accursed traffic! And then Clark's voice: "Clara, don't you understand—all that money—"

Accursed traffic!

Dirk gripped me. "They're going! We've got to tail them!"

I bundled up the microphone apparatus and stuffed it in the pocket of my jacket as we darted for the incline. The two above us were momentarily lost to view.

"They signaled a car," Dirk flung back at me. "I'll follow them—you can stay around here and watch the house for Grayley—he may come out."

But when we gained the upper level Clark and the woman had parted. She was boarding a taxi, a small public aëro-car; and Clark was moving away among the passing pedestrians.

"Try and stay with him, Jac! When you get a chance, send a message to Beth at the office for me. And I'll do the same when I can."

He was gone. I slipped into the crowd and followed Clark. Behind me I saw Dirk pick up another air taxi and roll swiftly down the viaduct after the woman.

I WAS convinced that Clark and Mrs. Roger had not seen Dirk and me. All this vicinity was dim with eerie shifting lights and a confusion of movement. I very nearly lost sight of Clark, as he moved swiftly through the crowd on the pedestrian viaduct.

I followed. Clark did not seem to be aware of me. He walked rapidly, and when he was well away from the Roger home he suddenly stopped at the edge of the traffic and signaled an aëro-car. One drew quickly up to him. He boarded it and rolled away, down the viaduct.

Within ten seconds I was boarding another.

"That red-barred car ahead of us, see it?" I flashed my Federal identification at the pilot. "Ten dollars in gold-leaf for you—if you don't lose that car. Are you fast?"

"Fast?" He meshed in his gears and we leaped into the traffic. "Fast? Say, chief, nothin' flies faster than this little blackbird you're in."

But we had no need of speed. The red and white car ahead of us proceeded in swift but orderly fashion along the viaduct. We were presently in the Fordham District, rolling along the lowest of three levels, with shops and lighted arcades to the sides and a network of pedestrian catwalks crossing overhead. It was a neighborhood business center which at this hour of the evening was a riot of blaring noise.

Clark's car drew to the side, and he leaped out; but, a square behind him, I was out as swiftly as he. A level higher, and farther along, I saw the illumined metal entrance of the Fordham branch of the Bank of Great New York.

I recalled those fragments of conversation between Clark and Clara Roger which I had overheard with the eavesdropper. She had told him: "—at the bank. But, Peter dear—"

And he had said: "—all that money—"

Were they arranging to meet here at the bank? Had Clara Roger come here ahead of Clark? Perhaps she was in the bank now. Then Dirk should be around here.

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The various levels and pedestrian walks were crowded with people. I did not see Dirk; I had all I could do not to lose Clark. He went up an escalator, and I paralleled him. On the second level he stood in an angle of the parapet wall. Obviously he was waiting, watching the front entrance to the bank. And fairly near him, with the pedestrian stream flowing between us, I found shelter and waited . . .

WITHIN the bank at that moment Clara Roger sat waiting for a draft-check to be honored which she had just presented for payment.

The astounded manager could only gasp, and ask her deferentially, "Do you want this in cash, Mrs. Roger?"

"In gold-leaf certificates, yes."

"But the danger—you can't carry that much money. Let me deliver it—"

"Do what I ask, if you please. And will you hurry?"

She sat waiting; and by a side entrance of the bank Dirk had gained the manager's office. They stood now gazing at the little oblong slip of paper. It was drawn neatly in ink—a demand in favor of Clara Roger for ninety-two thousand gold dollars; and it was signed William Roger.

"It is within fifty dollars of all he has here on deposit," said the manager.

"A forgery?"

"But it isn't, Mr. Dirk. Our graphologist just passed it."

The check was dated four days ago—the day before William Roger vanished. It was now three minutes of the bank's evening closing time—illegal to delay payment longer. They might have chanced some excuse, but with the wife of the city's chief executive the bank did not dare.

"I've got to pay it, Mr. Dirk."

"All right," said Dirk swiftly. "I'll follow her. Send that canceled check to my office at once."

From behind the wicket Dirk watched Clara Roger receive the thin oblong packet of gold-leaf notes. She was pale, but calm. She did not count the money. She placed the packet in a burnished metal hand-case of the sort women carry, smiled her thanks, and turning, left the bank by its front entrance—walking swiftly and plunging into the passing crowd of people.

For Dirk, I think that moment presented a more difficult task than for me. Yet both of us miscarried our attempts. Dirk saw the woman for just a moment outside the bank, and then he lost her in the mob. And a minute or two later, a block away from him, all the levels and the arcade entrances and the overhead catwalks were abruptly illumined in a flash of white light. Dirk, with hundreds of other pedestrians, rushed toward that crime-beacon . . .

I saw Clara Roger when she emerged from the bank, but I had no knowledge of what had transpired inside. Clark began moving swiftly forward. I could see his bobbing head in the crowd. I waited. The woman was coming toward me. I thought Clark would join her and both of them come my way. But she swerved quickly across to a parallel walk. I lost sight of her. I had miscalculated what would happen. Both of them darted into the crowd as though suddenly anxious to shake off pursuit. It took me so by surprise that I lost sight of them both.

But luck was with me. I saw Clara Roger again within a minute. She was loitering, and suddenly I thought I saw Clark approaching her. If it was he, he had thrown a dark flowing silk cape over his shoulders. He jostled against her, and I thought she handed

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him something. They were well away from me, but there was a glint as though she had given him a metal case. Then suddenly he was running, and there was the figure of another man close after him. The crowd tightened. There seemed a scuffle. Then a traffic director's alarm siren screamed, and the actinic alarm-light of the street flooded everything with its glare.

But Clark and his pursuer, whom I had no more than vaguely glimpsed with a vague idea it might be Grayley, were gone. Dirk and I met as we were forcing our way into the glare. Clara Roger had seemed to try to escape; but she was recognized and deferentially stopped by the traffic man. He forced back the crowd and called an aëro-car for her. I saw, and so did Dirk, that she was no longer carrying the metal hand bag. The money, Dirk gasped, was gone! The halted traffic gave her car free space. It rolled forward, took the air, skimmed perilously between two lateral catwalks and sailed into the starlight . . .

"MORE tangible a lead? I should say it is, Jac!"

"She and Clark! Ninety-two thousand of your father's money, Beth! What have you got to say to that?"

We were back at the office, where Beth had been waiting anxiously for our return.

"But I don't understand—" she gasped.

"You don't? Well, it isn't very complicated. Clark and your damned stepmother—"

"Don't theorize," Dirk broke in sharply. "This is no time for theory. If that check shows what I think it will show—"

Beth gripped him, white-faced, with blazing eyes. "You mean to say my father wrote a check three or four days ago for ninety-two thousand dollars and Clara cashed it and gave it to Clark?"

"That's what the date is on the check. That's what I want to find out —*when he wrote it.* If it's when I think it was... Ah, here's the check—"

The small cylinder came tumbling onto Dirk's desk from the vacuum tube. Beth sat in a chair, forcing herself to calmness, watching while Dirk opened the cylinder and pounced upon the canceled check which the bank had mailed us.

"Miss Beth, while I work on this check, you try and find out if Mrs. Roger is at home. I suppose she is. Don't talk to her—just make sure she is there. Call the maid, and then disconnect . . . And you, Jac, call our chief in Washington. He won't be at his office—at his residence, try him there. Say I want Federal permission to force questions on the City Manager's wife under oath. Explain—and I'll talk to him if he wants it. Hurry up, you two!"

Dirk rushed into his laboratory with the check. In ten minutes he was back, check in hand. I could see at once by the expression on his face that he had learned something definite—and startling.

"What did they say?" he demanded of us.

"Clara is at home," said Beth. "Vance, the maid, said she was ill and preferred not to speak with me."

"Good enough! And you, Jac?"

"I got the chief. But not the permission. He says he'll have to look further into the matter. To put Mrs. Roger on oath—that's too drastic."

"Oh, is it? Well, he'll give me the permission quickly enough! That check

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she just cashed was written by her husband—not four days ago, before he vanished, but to-day! I've measured the oxidation-rate of the ink. Roger wrote it this afternoon, or at the earliest this morning. Get me the chief in Washington . . . Don't look like that, Miss Beth! It doesn't necessarily mean that harm has come to your father. But it does mean that he's probably being held a prisoner somewhere. He wrote the check to-day—was forced to write it, I'm convinced."

That meant that Mrs. Roger was in communication with her husband, and he wrote the draft to pay her all his available cash. But did he do it voluntarily? The sinister aspect of the thing came like a light in darkness. I could imagine that Clark had hired professional criminals to abduct Roger. The Federal Audit was a good excuse for his disappearance. And some one—Clark probably—had instigated the broadcast demand for parental consent, in order to throw suspicion upon Beth and me. To save himself from death Roger had written the check. And now, would Roger be murdered—and Clara Roger and her lover be left free to enjoy the money?

Dirk finished with Washington. Then he sent out a general order over the New York district for the arrest of Clark. And following that he put through an imperative audiphone call for Mrs. Roger. He sat gripping the instrument, his thin face grim with the intensity of his emotion.

"Are you there? I want Mrs. Roger."

The maid's voice said, "She will give no connection."

"Oh, yes, she will. I have Federal authority. Contempt of court if she doesn't. Tell her that."

He got her in a moment.

"What is it you want?" she demanded.

"This is Franklin Dirk. I have orders to put you on oath. Give me visual connection, please. I must see you, Mrs. Roger."

OUR mirror-grid lighted. Beth and I leaned over Dirk's shoulder. The image showed Clara Roger's pale, harassed face, with the grid on her dressing table showing Dirk and me.

"I accept the oath," she said quietly. "What is it you want to ask me?"

He struck her with it: "I want to know where Peter Clark went half an hour ago when you gave him that money."

We saw the blood drain from her face and lips and terror leap into her eyes. I thought she would faint, but she clung to her chair.

"Why, I—I did not. I don't know—"

"You're lying, Mrs. Roger. On oath, before witnesses. Where did Clark go?"

"I don't know," she said faintly.

"Nor where your husband is held?"

"No."

If it were possible for a greater intensity of terror to surge into her eyes, it came there now.

"Your husband—you know he was abducted by professional criminals?"

"Yes," she admitted frankly. And beside me I heard Beth gasp with horror. Dirk's swift, menacing voice went relentlessly on.

"You know that your husband is a prisoner, somewhere near here—and he wrote that check to-day—was forced to write it?"

"Yes. Oh, if you can—"

"Not murdered yet, is he?"

It made Beth clutch at me. On the

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mirror-grid I saw that Clara Roger's white lips were trying to stammer something, but the words would not come.

"Didn't Clark let you know where your husband is?" Dirk insisted.

"You—you—"

We saw her fall, and saw the maid rush forward to her. Our mirror went dark as the connections broke. And at once the instrument buzzed with an incoming call. The mirror lighted again. We saw the inside of a little public booth—a man's head and shoulders and his face gazing at us. It was Clark! I leaped instantly to trace the call, while Dirk kept him busy.

"Mr. Dirk? I tried to get you, but you were busy. I want you—I want you to come to me."

"Why, hello, Clark." Dirk forced himself to a sudden calmness. "What is it? I've been waiting for your call."

"I want you to come. I think I've found—I don't dare—"

His voice was breathless; his face held a mixture of eagerness and terror. "It's got to be now. There's no time—" He was almost incoherent. Then out of it emerged a meeting place for him and us. He named it—a lower ramp in the east side section of Manhattan near the water front.

"Will you come there?"

I saw on our image mirror that behind Clark in the booth a black-gloved arm and hand appeared. Beth murmured tensely into my ear: "What is that? What—"

But I had no time to answer. The black-gloved hand was behind Clark's shoulder and he was not aware of it. Then the hand touched him. He gasped, and whirled.

"What is it?" Dirk demanded.

Clark came back to the instrument. His voice sounded strange. "Nothing . . . Some one must have thought the booth was empty. Bumped into me, but he's gone . . . Will you come at once?"

"We'll come."

Dirk flung off the connection and leaped to his feet. "No time now, Jac—you heard what he said. Get our flash-guns. Here, this one is yours. And your microphone—you've got it? The police will comb that section around the visiphone booth, but I doubt if they'll catch him. Come on—I suppose the monorail will be quickest—it will drop us near the river . . . Miss Beth, you'll have to wait here."

"Jac, dear—"

But I could not stop to talk to her; there was the equipment to get ready.

Dirk stopped suddenly before her, and put his hands on her slim shoulders. "Miss Beth, I know that just waiting, doing nothing, is the hardest thing of all. But very often it's the woman's part. If you're going to be the wife of a detective—" He smiled gently. "Now is the time to get used to it."

And she bravely answered his smile. I think I never loved Beth so dearly as at that moment while she stood in the center of the office bravely smiling and gazing after us as we rushed out.

"BUT if it's an ambush," I suggested, as we hurried from the office and headed for the lift-car which would drop us to the city's ground-level corridor. "If it's a lure to get us—Clark knows we're after him—"

"We'll chance it—with caution. Jac, whatever you think we know about this affair—I'm beginning to think other things."

And so was I. Clark's attitude—and Clara Roger's—did not ring true

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to our appraisal of them as kidnapers. The monorail whirled us into the city slums—a dark and gloomy metal shambles as unlike the Westchester residential area as the poles of the earth. It was now nearly midnight. We left the monorail and on the ground level followed the dark city street toward the East River water front.

Rivington Ramp 80 was a small balconied circle where half a dozen disreputable streets and alleys converged. The dwelling houses, most of them ancient ramshackle brick and stone, went up no more than a dozen stories, with rusted iron balconies, and a few of the more modern catwalks dangling overhead. There was hardly a vehicle here—all were high up on the near-by viaducts leading to the Brooklyn river bridges. It was like a glimpse into the shambles of the past—these water front streets. All the criminals of the city congregated here, and the rest of the city was glad enough to have it so. There should have been a patrol officer at his post on Ramp 80, but he had not bothered to stay on duty.

There were a few pedestrians, and noise enough from the public drink shops, and a dance palace near-by. Dirk and I moved around the edge of the ramp. There was no sign of Clark. We came to the side street he had mentioned. It was no more than an alley—a dark gash in one of the buildings. We slid into it—a place of almost fetid blackness. Suddenly I stumbled upon something. A man, lying on the alley floor. Under Dirk's tiny flash light beam we saw that it was the body of Clark!

We bent over him, and he was not dead. But dying, there could be no doubt of that. His roving eyes recognized us. His twitching hand tried to reach for us.

"You came? I was afraid you wouldn't. I traced them—at last—"

Dirk raised his head. "But, Clark—"

"I'm finished. They've done me in. It's—poison, I guess. There in the booth when I called you—"

He clutched at his throat. On his neck I saw a little spot of red where it seemed that a needle had pricked.

His eyes were glazing. "You—I guess you've still got time. It's—they're under the old dock at the end of the street. Or near there. It wasn't more than ten minutes ago."

"Who?" Dirk demanded. "Roger? Have they got him there?"

"Yes. Roger—if they haven't—killed him yet. I was afraid—you or the police investigating—that would have meant death for him. Hurry—"

My mind flung back to that scene outside the bank. The man in the cloak who had been given the money by Mrs. Roger was not Clark. It was Clark who had chased the other man . . .

Dirk was saying gently, "We mistook you completely, Clark."

"Yes. I suppose—" His face and his tongue were choked with stagnant blood. "Yes. I—it doesn't matter. I don't want Roger to get murdered. She—loves him. She wouldn't—"

His hand tried to reach for Dirk. "She didn't dare tell me much. I did what I—could to help. I'm finished—"

His thickened tongue caught between his lips. He murmured, "She'll—know—I did my best—for her and—her husband—"

He twitched, shuddered, and the light went out of his staring eyes . . .

"GET out your microphone," Dirk whispered. "What a place! Try listening—it may help—if there's any one lurking around down in here—"

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It was like a broken rabbit warren. The ancient dock loomed above us. And far higher, and to one side, one of the great bridges glowed with its dotted rows of lights, and the light of its swiftly passing vehicles. The river—as though it were subterranean with all the lattice of structures over it—flowed dark and sullen some thirty feet beneath us. It was of no use now. The city had overgrown it.

Broken wooden rooms and cubbies and platforms were here among the piers under the crumbling dock, relic of a bygone age. From the overhead dock there had been a catwalk to a neighboring structure a hundred feet away. But it was broken now, dangling so that there was only a single cable stretched across the intervening water.

The place was black where we crouched under the dock. I tuned in the sound magnifier. And at once caught the murmur of men's voices.

"Overhead," I whispered. "Some one up inside the dock. Can we get up there?"

It seemed so. We clambered cautiously along rotting planks to where an old stairway led upward. And presently we were in the broken dock.

Dirk clutched at me. "Over there!" I barely heard his whisper. "That light—when you fire, Jac—it's to kill—take no chances on that."

The black tumble-down interior seemed thronged with ghosts of the past. There was a broken interior boarded enclosure and from its window a little light was straggling. And over the distant murmur of traffic noises we could hear now the near-by voices of men . . .

I caught just a brief glimpse of the interior of that little wooden room as we crept up to its window. The portly, middle-aged William Roger was lying bound and gagged on the littered floor. Two men were kneeling, fastening weights of iron to his arms and legs—men black-garbed and hooded. A third man, wholly enveloped in black and with hood drawn close over his face, was across the room, near where another window looked out upon the river.

That third man discovered us. He leaped and Dirk's bolt missed him. The two men upon Roger jumped erect; but before they could draw their weapons my bolt caught one, and Dirk's hit the other. They crumpled and fell upon Roger, who struggled and twisted beneath their bodies.

The third man went through the window. My bolt struck the casement, shredded it and set it on fire. But I missed the man. His black-gloved fingers clung for an instant, and then he dropped.

"Inside!" Dirk shouted. "He didn't fall far!"

We gained the room, went across it. Beneath the outer window, ten feet down, was a line of planks. The hooded figure had dropped to them. And the end of that broken catwalk was there, its single remaining cable fastened there. The hooded figure was on the cable, running along it out over the dark river.

I fired, but miscalculated the shadowy swaying form. The man's arms were outstretched to balance himself, and he ran like a monkey. I fired again, but he was out of range. He kept on going.

He reached the other dock, ran back along it, jumped to a little connecting bridge-walk; and in a moment we saw the tiny blob of him at the foot of an escalator leading up to the main bridge artery over the river to Brooklyn. We

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saw him reach the pedestrian throng up there and vanish.

ROGER was unharmed, though in a few minutes more they would have dropped him into the sullen river. The two men we had killed were professional criminals, with a persistent police and prison record—the sort of men any one with the price may hire to do murder.

And we found the price of this affair on them—ten thousand dollars each, of William Roger's money. The rest of it was gone—with that third man, doubtless.

Roger did not know who the fellow was. He had always been masked; and he had never spoken, save in a whisper. But it was obvious that he was the man who had hired the other two; who had taken Roger's check, and returned just a few minutes ago with the cash.

And seeing what we had seen of his escape across that single cable strand over the water, we could not fail to guess who he must be. A man with the skill to perform such an unusual feat; the man who for a television broadcaster had done acrobatic tricks walking tight ropes for the delight of a television audience . . .

I bent down over Roger where he was sitting on the floor chafing his arms and legs, which were numb.

"You're not hurt?" I asked. "It was a close nip—"

"You, Jac? I hadn't thought I would be thanking you—after that last little argument we had—"

He reached and gripped my hand. He was white and shaken from his experience. He leaned back weakly on one elbow.

"Have Clara and Beth been frightened over me? Where are they? Can't you audiphone them now? Relieve their anxiety—"

It was the thought in my mind, too.

THERE was nothing wrong with William Roger's accounts, when the Federal Audits were held that next morning. In the afternoon Roger and Beth came secretly to our office. Dirk had invited Grayley to come for a little private conversation, and he acquiesced readily. When he entered, Beth and her father were hidden as witnesses, and hidden instruments gave sight and sound connection with Headquarters.

Only Dirk and myself were in evidence as Grayley jauntily entered. He was smilingly self-confident.

"Well," he greeted us, "I suppose you've got a battery of instruments to record everything I say. Go ahead—I haven't a thing to conceal."

"You got away from us last night with very great dexterity," Dirk began crisply. "I never realized before what possible use such skill could be to its possessor."

Grayley raised his black brows and laughed. "I heard about that fellow running over a cable. Say, if you think I can walk that cable, you put a net under it and I'll prove how easy I can fall off."

"Quite so," smiled Dirk. "Falling off ought to be equally easy. Sit down. I want to talk with you. We were all at Roger's home by eleven o'clock last night. Where were you?"

"Me? I was playing cards with some friends. I've got a couple of them to prove it, if you want—"

"It won't be necessary. Sit down, Grayley. Hand me your hat. I want a serious talk with you."

My heart was pounding as I came forward with a glass microscope slide,

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and I saw Grayley's hand go out with his hat as Dirk reached for it. I stumbled on the floor rug. I think I did it naturally—Dirk and I had practiced this for an hour past. And as I staggered, my hand with the microscope slide came down sharply and struck Grayley's wrist.

"Oh—I'm sorry—" I stammered.

Simultaneously Dirk leaped to his feet.

"Jac, you fool! Clumsy fool! Are you hurt, Grayley?"

"No. Not much."

Then Dirk saw the glass slide in my hand and the blood welling out on Grayley's wrist.

"Jac! Good God, is that what you cut him with? Don't you know that's a culture of Clark's blood—and I'm trying to find out what p o i s o n killed—"

There was just an instant when Grayley stood staring stupidly at the jagged cut near the base of his thumb. Then terror swept him. A wild panic of terror.

"That? Clark's blood! That—" His voice rose into a scream. "Get me a physician. You damn' fools, don't stand there staring like that! Clark's blood—in me! Why, that's death! That's curare that killed Clark! It's death to me now! Get me a physician."

THAT was the end of it. During those minutes while Grayley was waiting for the physician (with the deadly poison, so he thought, circulating in his blood) he yielded to Dirk's pounding and made a full confession. He told us where he had hidden the money, and there we subsequently found it. He had hired the two professional criminals to abduct Roger, and told his sister that her husband was being held for ransom. He told her that the abductors had communicated with him and demanded the money of him. And he had promised it, and persuaded his sister that a word or look which brought the police into the search would cause her husband's death. Then Clark had dabbled in it, and Grayley killed him.

Grayley had slipped out of the house just after Clark finished talking to us on the monorail platform. He had met his sister outside the bank, and gotten the money from her as they had arranged. And he had bribed an under-official of the broadcast service to fake that demand from Jac Baker.

Had the scheme been successful, Mrs. Roger would always have believed that the ransom was paid by her brother, and that in spite of it her husband had been murdered.

His confession w a s hysterically poured out, mingled with wild demands for a physician. When it was over Dirk put him in police custody and sent him from the office with scant ceremony, leaving the officials to tell him he needed a lawyer, not a physician.

In our private office the smiling William Roger faced Beth and me. He took us each by a hand.

"Poor Clark! I never liked him—if I had known what was really in his heart for Clara and me! And you, Beth dear—don't you think you and Clara will be better friends now?"

"Oh, I do! I do, father."

"And you—you persistent young cub—" There was a gleam of quizzical humor in his gray eyes as he t u r n e d to me. "I was prejudiced against having a detective for a son-in-law, but I discovered last night that a detective is sometimes a very handy person to have around."

THE END.

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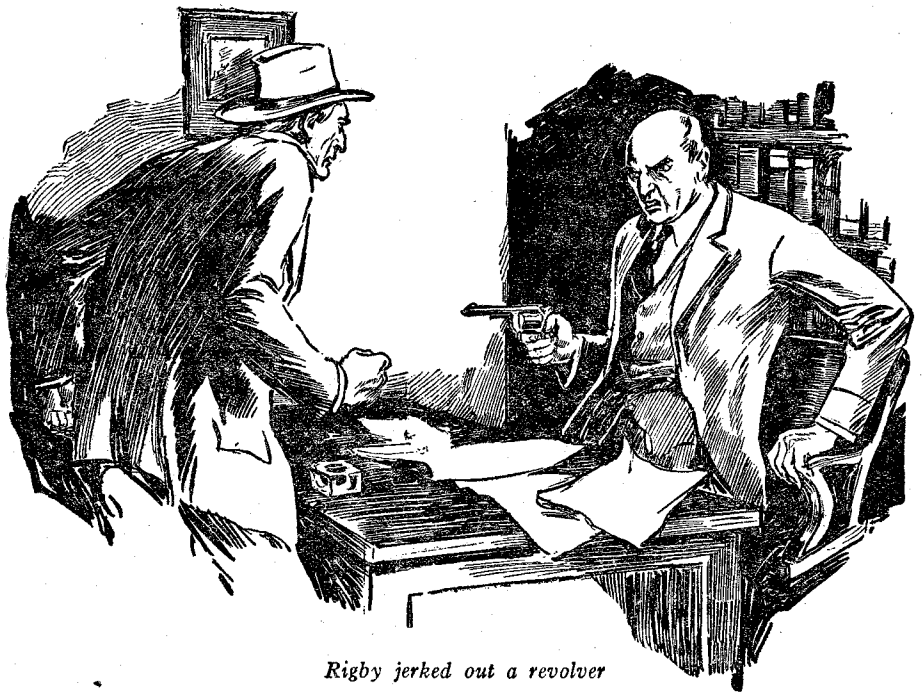

Rigby jerked out a revolver

Wild Oats

His partner kidnaped, a price on his own head, Johnny Bell released himself from a trap in his own ranch house—to find a deputy sheriff awaiting him

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "The Turquoise Trail," "The Trail of Deceit," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT.

YOUNG Whizzer Lee had never had a serious thought in his life until his lawyer-guardian in Philadelphia, Kenneth Ross, informed him that his inherited fortune of a million dollars had been sunk in the Copper Prince Mine in Arizona, which had been flooded.

Making the best of a bad situation, Whizzer takes the thousand dollars given him by the unscrupulous Ross, who had pillaged Whizzer's inheritance, and starts west. A train wreck halts him at Red Feather, Arizona, where he falls in with Johnny Bell, a young rancher.

Unknown to Whizzer, the near-by Z Bar 8 ranch is owned by the lawyer, Ross, who calls himself Harvey in his dealings with his Red Feather representative, Banker Henry Rigby, and his ranch manager, Jim McKee.

Jealousy flares on the part of Dell Carver, Z Bar 8 foreman, and Zell Orme, his assistant, when they see the girls they fancy, Ella Rigby and Rose

This story began in the Argosy for December 26.

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McKee, becoming friendly with Johnny and Whizzer. Orme and Carver make veiled threats against their rivals.

McKee tells Banker Rigby that cattle are being rustled from the Z Bar 8, and this information, added to the fact that Whizzer Lee is in the vicinity, brings Ross post haste from the East.

When Rigby's bank is robbed, Rigby places the blame on Johnny Bell, whose attentions to his daughter are resented by the banker. Whizzer finds Johnny who has been slugged, and takes him to their JB ranch, where, to their surprise, they discover part of the loot from the bank in the ranch house, and the body of Sheriff Reese, who has been murdered with .41 caliber bullets—the kind Johnny uses.

Johnny becomes a fugitive. "Lonesome" Wolf, the deputy sheriff, is none too active in searching for him, being more or less convinced, by Whizzer's straightforward story, that Johnny is innocent. Johnny visits the JB ranch to get food, sees a group of men coming, and hides himself in the cellar. From that place he hears Whizzer being attacked and kidnaped, but cannot get out in time to help him. When he does free himself from the cellar, he emerges to face Lonesome Wolf.

CHAPTER X.

THE PLOT AGAINST WHIZZER.

JOHNNY stared at the deputy sheriff. "You had a hell of a time gittin' out, didn't yuh?" said Lonesome.

"Was you here all that time, Lonesome?"

"Shore."

"And yuh didn't offer to help me!"

"Didn't know it was you. I thought mebbe a woodpecker got down there by mistake. Where's Whizzer?"

"That's what I'm wonderin', Lonesome," said Johnny, and proceeded to tell Lonesome all he knew about the situation.

"Don't make sense," declared Lonesome. "How could anybody make a stake off Whizzer? Why gag him?"

"Don't ask me," said Johnny wearily. "Why did they talk about the Triple X outfit and the town of Shelton?"

"Now, yo're askin' me riddles. Do yuh realize yo're worth a thousand dollars, alive or dead?"

"Whizzer told me. Are yuh aimin' to collect, Lonesome?"

Lonesome yawned and shook his head.

"Yo're a hell of an officer!"

"I ain't."

"Ain't what?"

"Ain't no officer."

"No? Since when?"

"I got m'self conspired against."

"Yea-a-ah?"

"Shore. Yuh see, I antagonized old man Rigby somethin' awful, and I told the prosecutin' attorney he was a damn ol' lady and ort to git him a petticoat. He said I was neglectin' my duty—my sworn duty. I told him I didn't have no sworn duty; I was jist the sheriff's hired hand.

"Well, he said he'd block any attempt to make me sheriff, and I said I'd help him all I could. We got to kinda tellin' each other a lot of true things about each other, and I pasted him on the nose. Then I wrote my resignation, and came out here to associate with somebody that understood me. Yuh see, I've been misunderstood, Johnny."

"Oh, yuh hadn't ought to quit a job like that, Lonesome."

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"It palled upon me, feller. I never was very strong for the law."

"But, damn it, Lonesome, you can't associate with me."

"Wasn't aimin' to; I thought Whizzer was here."

"Oh," grunted Johnny. "Well, I wish we knowed somethin' about what happened to Whizzer. How in the devil do they figure to make money out of him, I wonder?"

Johnny took the lamp and stepped into the main room, which was also the bunk-room of the ranch. Some one had opened both his and Whizzer's war-bags and flung their clothes all around the room. The bag of silver was gone.

"What the devil did they do that for?" wondered Johnny. "They never had to throw all our clothes around to find that silver."

"Huntin' for somethin'," said Lonesome. "Look at them pants. They turned the pockets inside out."

"Them's Whizzer's pants."

"I'd know that. You never had pants as good as them."

"I've had some awful good pants in my life, Lonesome."

"Yeah! With rivets instead of sewin'. I've had lots of 'em."

THE coat which matched the pants was hanging on a nail, nearly hidden by an old slicker. It had apparently been overlooked. Lonesome took it off the nail and searched the pockets. Here were several old letters addressed to Whizzer, and one minus the envelope. Lonesome unfolded it and held it near the lamp.

"C'mere, Johnny!" he grunted, after perusing it for a moment.

It was the letter Kenneth Ross had handed Whizzer Lee, and it had been sent to Kenneth Ross, instead of to "Harvey." The two men read it carefully.

"Copper Prince!" snorted Lonesome. "It says the water came in on the thousand-foot level, and is now within sixty feet of the surface. Why, the damn liar! It's only a hundred and fifty feet deep, and dry as a bone. Hell, they spent all their money driftin'!"

"Look at that name, will yuh?" blurted Johnny. "Henry H. Rigby, President. Look at that date, will yuh? Why, Lonesome, they ain't worked that mine for two years, and he's reportin' it closin' down a month ago!"

"Johnny," replied Lonesome slowly, "there's somethin' wrong. Who is this Kenneth Ross, I wonder? A feller named Harvey owned the Copper Prince; the same feller that owns the Z Bar 8. I hear he's out at the Z Bar 8 right now."

"It seems to me that Henry Rigby, the holier-than-thou, has been lyin' on paper, Lonesome."

"Dog-gone if it don't. But how does this affect Whizzer? He ain't had nothin' at all to do with the Copper Prince."

"He never mentioned it," said Johnny softly, thoughtfully. "Never did mention the Copper Prince. But, Lonesome, he told me a queer story of how his father had a million invested in a mine that flooded. Whizzer's father left everythin' to him—everythin' invested in that mine. On the showdown, Whizzer was busted. That's how he happened to come here—headin' for California."

"Wasn't never no million invested in the Copper Prince, Johnny."

"Well, wasn't old Rigby interested in the Copper Prince, before he came here to run this bank?"

"Yeah, he was."

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"And didn't this feller Harvey own the mine?"

"I've heard he did. After that busted, he bought out the bank and the Z Bar 8. Whizzer told me that his lawyer's name was Ross. It was in this lawyer's office that Whizzer found that camera picture of Rose McKee. This letter is to Ross, tellin' him that the levels of the Copper Prince is flooded, and that everythin' is lost. If Lee's father owned the Copper Prince, where the hell does Harvey come in at, I'd like to know?"

"I reckon I'm ridin' to Shelton tonight," said Lonesome.

"So am I," declared Johnny.

"No, you ain't. You dang fool, you better hide in a hole and drag the hole in after yuh."

"I done that once, didn't I, Lonesome? I'm ridin' with yuh. Hell, I'm as safe there as here—mebbe safer. They won't look for me in Shelton. Anyway, that's a different county."

"It's yore neck—not mine," replied Lonesome. "Git yore bronc, cowboy; a couple damn fools are goin' on a wild goose chase."

CHAPTER XI.

WHIZZER STARTS SHOOTING.

IT was a long time before Whizzer awoke. That blow from the rifle barrel had nearly fractured his skull. He was in utter darkness, owing to a heavy bandage over his eyes; his mouth was full of cloth, and he seemed to be lying across a boat in a heavy sea.

It required some time for him to realize that he was lying on his belly across a saddle, with the horse traveling at a jog-trot. Ropes, which cut him cruelly, held him tightly to the saddle. Extreme nausea and a blinding headache caused him to lose consciousness again, and his next sensation was of being handled roughly and finally being thrown upon a bed of some sort.

He could hear voices around him, but they meant nothing. They seemed very small and far away. The bandage was still around his eyes, but the gag was gone now. Except for the dull ache in his head he had no feeling. He tried to remember who he was and what had happened, but it was no use.

Suddenly it all came back to him with a rush. He tried to sit up, but his aching muscles refused to respond. His hands were tied, and the rope seemed to have been fastened behind him. His feet were also tied together. He relaxed and drew a deep breath. Men were talking, and it sounded as though they were in an adjoining room. Whizzer could hear disjointed sentences at first. A man was saying:

". . . know what would happen if they found it out."

"Who will find out? I tell yuh it's a cinch."

Just a low rumble of conversation for a while, and a voice raised in protest:

"Hell, I never figured on anythin' like that."

"Well, I had to give the sheriff his cut. He knows who signed McKee's name to all them bills of sale."

"He didn't need so much."

"If it wasn't for him, our game wouldn't work; you know that. No way of alterin' yore brands."

"Oh, well, it's all right; we'll need him plenty. As long as he's deaf, dumb and blind—"

"He will be; don'tcha worry about him."

The voices trailed off to silence. Whizzer didn't know what the conversation meant, but it sounded very much

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as though they had been having some dealings with a crooked sheriff. It was all right with Whizzer. He wished that some one would come and give him some water. He couldn't think of any earthly reason for them to knock him down and make him a captive. He had never had any trouble with any of them, except Zell Orme.

Finally he went to sleep, and later was awakened by voices near him. A man was saying:

"Naw, he's still out. I tell yuh, we better git a doctor for him; his skull is busted. Ain't nobody goin' to stay out that long with jist a pop on the head. I'm scared he'll die."

"What the hell do we care? I shore ain't goin' to bring no doctor out here for him. Pour some whisky down his neck, if yuh want to. That last keg would shore bring a wooden Injun to life."

"Mebbe some water would be better. Jist what's the idea, anyway? How are we goin' to git money out of Harvey? What's this hombre to him?"

"Stop speakin' names, will yuh?"

"Oh, hell, this jigger can't hear anythin'."

"Yuh never can tell. Pour some water down his neck."

"Yuh ain't goin' to put no guard over *him* to-night, are yuh?"

"I hope to tell yuh I ain't. If he's alive in the mornin' he'll be lucky."

Whizzer heard footsteps; a door closed, and he was alone again. The conversation had disclosed very little. Who was this man Harvey, he wondered? Harvey? Wasn't that the name of the man from Philadelphia, who was at the Z Bar 8? From Philadelphia—owner of the Z Bar 8—and these men, whoever they were, were going to use him to get money out of Harvey.

"Somebody must be crazy," decided Whizzer. "I guess they got hit on the head, instead of me."

HIS head began throbbing again, and he sank into a sort of stupor. He remembered hearing voices again, and when he awoke his blindfold was gone, his legs and arms free.

The light was dim, but he could see that he was in sort of a storeroom; a place about twelve feet square, in which were hung several old saddles, some harness, and on the floor were several boxes, a pack-saddle or two and a number of tarpaulins. Whizzer was lying on some blankets, which had been placed on a folded tarpaulin. Near one corner was a rough door, but there were no windows.

Whizzer got up and stretched his sore muscles. His head was swollen and sore, but it did not ache now. He walked around the room like a man with wooden legs, but after a few moments they worked better. Carefully he tested the door, but found it locked or barred from the other side.

He went back and sat down on the bed, trying to puzzle out what it was all about. He remembered the conversation he had heard, but it did not seem to make sense. Then he heard footsteps in the adjoining room, and some one knocked on the door.

"Lee!" called a voice. "Lee, are yuh awake?"

Whizzer was on the point of replying, but something told him to ignore the question. The bar creaked, as the man lifted it out of its socket, and Whizzer quickly sprawled on the blanket again, his face hidden.

The man came in and stooped down beside him. A hand gripped his shoulder and shook him roughly, but Whizzer showed no sign of life.

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"Damn it all!" the man muttered. "I told 'em he'd shuffle off if they didn't git a doctor. I'll pour some more water on him, I guess."

As the man shifted around to get the bucket, Whizzer opened one eye. The man was on his knees beside the bed, half turned away, as he reached for the bucket, and his holstered gun was within two feet of Whizzer's shoulder.

Whizzer's next move even surprised himself. He reached out, jerked the heavy gun from its holster, and jammed the muzzle against the man's side.

"Hell!" snorted the man. "Suckers ain't all dead yet!"

"Not even sick," replied Whizzer.

It was a man Whizzer had never seen before; a buck-tooth cowboy, badly in need of a shave and haircut. His little eyes were set close together, and he had a monkey-like expression as he squinted at the gun muzzle.

Whizzer backed to the door.

"I'm goin' out," he said evenly. "You stay where you are, or I'll punch you full of holes."

"Ke-rect," said the man. "Have a good time, dude."

WHIZZER stepped out and shut the door. He was in a long bunk house, the open door twenty feet ahead of him. There were tumbled blankets in the bunks, a card table and stove. When Whizzer was within a few feet of the doorway, a man stepped in. For an instant they looked at each other. The man grunted, reached for his revolver as Whizzer lifted his gun and fired point-blank.

The heavy bullet seemed to fairly fling the man backward, and he threw up both hands as he fell into the yard. Whizzer's legs did not function very well, as he went running past the fallen man. To his left was a ranch house, to his right a pole corral; and beyond that was a brushy hillside.

There were men running from the ranch house. Some one yelled a warning, and a bullet hummed off the dirt in front of Whizzer. Another bullet whispered past his head.

Whizzer whirled to a stop, flung up his gun and fired at the group of men, which scattered along the side of the house. Then he started running toward the corral. His one hope was to get through that and into that brush. He fell through the first fence, dodged a couple of loose horses which had been frightened by the shooting, and headed for the opposite side.

As he crawled through the fence he looked back. Three men were running down from the house, trying to get a shot at him, but the two horses blocked their aim. Whizzer sent another shot past the horses, started to run, but tripped and went sprawling, flinging the gun ten feet away.

He staggered to his feet, breathing jerkily. The men were so close now that he couldn't hope to escape. Then came the report of a gun from up in the brush, and one of the men went to his knees. The other two jerked to a stop as a fusillade of bullets churned up the dust at their feet.

They appeared to forget Whizzer as they made a mad dash for the other fence, heading toward the stable. Whizzer staggered ahead, picked up his gun, and scrambled in behind a mesquite thicket. He didn't have any idea what had happened to save him; and he wasn't going to stop and investigate. The brush was so thick he couldn't see the house now, but he was following a cattle trail which wound around under a big rock and came into a little cañon.

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Panting heavily, he stopped to catch a breath. Then he blinked, shut his eyes tightly for a moment and opened them again. No, this wasn't a part of his recent nightmare. In the middle of the trail stood Johnny Bell and Lonesome Wolf.

"Howdy, feller," said Lonesome casually.

Whizzer tried to laugh, but it was only a grimace.

"If yuh can still travel, we better be goin'," said Lonesome. "Them Triple X hombres might feel hurt over what we jist done to 'em."

"I—I never expected you here," said Whizzer.

"It was sort of a surprise party," grinned Johnny. "We shore put the brakes on them whippoorwills."

"I—I shot a man!" gasped Whizzer. "I just remembered."

"Don't let that git yuh down," grinned Lonesome. "C'mon."

They went in single file for about a quarter of a mile, where they found the two horses.

"Git in the saddle, Whizzer," said Johnny. "We're movin' fast. Gee, you shore got busted on the head."

"I know I did, and I'll tell you all I—"

"Save it," advised Lonesome. "It will keep, kid."

"But how in the world did you know I was here?" asked Whizzer, as they rode along the brushy trail.

"We didn't know yuh was there," replied Johnny.

THEY traveled along for several miles.

Whizzer was getting weak again, and Johnny advised a stop.

"We're across the county line now, anyway," said Lonesome. "If that Triple X outfit notifies the sheriff, he can't come beyond Poco Cañon. Up there under them live oaks is a little spring, if the cows ain't tramped it all out."

"I—I need water," said Whizzer.

"You need whisky—and I've got some," said Lonesome.

A big drink of whisky gave Whizzer a new lease on life. Johnny examined the wound on Whizzer's head, and told him he was lucky to be alive. He explained what he had heard from the cellar, and the trouble he had in getting back.

Lonesome sat with his back against a tree, chuckling softly.

"If they hadn't mentioned the Triple X and Shelton, we'd never knowed where to look," explained Johnny. "Me and Lonesome decided that they wouldn't take yuh to Shelton; so we took a chance and watched the Triple X."

"They're a crooked bunch," said Whizzer. "I heard them talking about stolen cattle, in which the sheriff got some of the money."

"No!" exclaimed Lonesome. "Yuh did? Stolen cattle, eh?"

"Something about somebody signing McKee's name to a bill of sale."

"Ah-ha-a-ah!" exploded Lonesome. "Da-a-aw-gone!"

"What's eatin' you?" asked Johnny.

"That's how they done it. McKee told Reese that the Z Bar 8 was losin' cows, and Reese thought McKee was crazy. There wasn't no way of doin' it. But with a bill of sale—don'tcha see, Johnny? Somebody sells the Triple X a bunch of Z Bar 8 cows, and they ship from Shelton. A crooked sheriff—and a forged bill of sale. Daw-gone!"

"But who?" asked Johnny. "I can see how it would work, but who in this county stands in with the Triple X and the sheriff?"

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"That's for us to find out."

"I'm not fightin' any battles for the Z Bar 8, Lonesome; and yo're not an officer any more. Don't forget I'm worth a thousand dollars, dead or alive."

"But where do I come in on all this?" asked Whizzer. "What have I done? I don't see where I'm worth anything to anybody."

"I dunno," said Lonesome. "In every pack of cards there's a joker. I never could see any use for the danged thing, except in some places where they are crazy enough to play it as a wild card."

"I suppose I'm the joker in this deck," said Whizzer with a wry smile.

"Anyway, yo're an extra card that don't seem to fit. Do you know this Harvey person?"

"No, I've never met him."

"Uh-huh. Johnny tells me that yuh lost all yore money in a mine."

"That's true, Lonesome."

"Uh-huh; I wonder if it is. Looky here, Whizzer."

LONESOME got to his feet and walked away from the tree. He pointed off to the southeast.

"See that kinda green spot 'way down there? That's Shelton. Now, see if yuh can shift yore eyes a little farther south, where that gray hill fades in ag'inst them two peaks. See where I mean? Fine. Now, see if yuh can see some little black spots about halfway up that hill."

"Yes, I can see them."

"Yo're lookin' at the m i n e that broke yuh."

"The mine that broke me? You mean—the Copper Prince?"

"That's him."

"You're not joking with me, are you, Lonesome?"

"I'm not—but I reckon somebody else did, kid."

Whizzer stared for a long time.

"Why, I had no idea the mine was around here."

"Do yuh remember the letter from the mine?" asked Johnny. "The one yore lawyer showed you?"

"I still have it, Johnny."

Johnny grinned and handed it to Whizzer, who looked at him blankly.

"Look at the signature on that letter," said Johnny.

Whizzer looked at the signature closely, a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"Rigby! Henry H. Rigby! Why, that must be the banker!"

"Didn't you know that before?"

"Honestly, I never paid any attention to the signature. The news hit me so hard that I absent-mindedly pocketed the letter. No, I never paid any attention to the signature. Of course, at the time, it would have meant nothing to me."

"Notice the date?" asked Lonesome.

"Yes."

"Well, feller, don't it look funny to you? That mine closed down two years ago, because they lost the vein. I'll bet yuh a new saddle there ain't a quart of water in the whole workin's. It stopped work two years ago—and Rigby reports that it jist closed down—a month ago. I don't believe Rigby has been there since he took over the bank."

"Why, that—that's funny, Lonesome. I don't see—"

"And another thing," added Lonesome. "This feller Harvey, who owns the Z Bar 8 and the Red Feather Bank, also owned the Copper Prince. If you had a million invested in that mine—say, listen: I don't believe one-tenth of that much was ever spent there."

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"Well, it is all rather amazing!"

"Is that lawyer of yours an honest man?" asked Johnny.

"Kenneth Ross? Why, he handled everything for dad, and—"

Whizzer sat down and reached for Lonesome's bottle.

"I got rather shaky," he said. "Everything started whirling."

"Take a good one," advised Lonesome. "Mebbe that will start things whirlin' the other way, and you'll be even."

"Yuh know," said Johnny, "you found Rose McKee's picture on yore lawyer's desk."

"And other pictures taken around the Z Bar 8," added Whizzer.

"I think you better git a good look at Harvey," said Lonesome.

Whizzer looked keenly at Lonesome for a moment, and his eyes widened with a sudden idea.

"Kenneth Harvey Ross!"

"Check!" grunted Johnny. "The old brain starts workin'."

"My God, it can't be possible, Johnny! Do you think Kenneth Ross—"

"It's worth lookin' into," said Lonesome. "Let's ride back to the JB and see if the posse has torn it down yet. We can circle wide and take it easy."

"Take me over to the Z Bar 8," said Whizzer.

"And bury yuh out on the lone pra-ree," grunted Lonesome. "Yo're goin' to play safe, if yuh ask me."

CHAPTER XII.

ROSS UNMASKS.

AT ten o'clock in the morning, Dell Carver, Zell Orme and Gus Linehart, rode in at the Z Bar 8. Carver had told McKee that they were going to Shelton and might not be back early. Kenneth Ross, the pseudo Harvey, was anxious to get their report, and met them at the corral. Linehart and Orme took care of Carver's horse, leaving Carver and Ross together to discuss things.

"Well?" queried Ross anxiously.

"Well enough," replied Carver.

"Then it's all settled, eh?"

"No, it ain't all settled—yet," replied Carver coldly.

"What do you mean?" queried Ross anxiously.

"I mean that yore man is where he can't do any harm—unless I let him."

Ross thought this over carefully. "I don't quite get you," he said.

"Listen, Harvey," Carved lowered his voice, "I'm no two-bit killer. I've got Lee where he can't do anythin'. But the question is, what is his scalp worth to you?"

"I told you what it was worth, Carver."

"Too cheap. The law ain't got a thing on me, and for a big stake, I'll take one chance. But she's got to be a good one. You know where I stand now."

"Blackmail, eh?"

"Call it what yuh like."

"Why, you dirty little—"

"Whoa!" snapped Carver. "Keep yore tongue workin' sweet, Harvey. I'm no more of a crook than you are. Rigby told me enough to—"

"Damn Rigby!"

"Suits me fine. Damn him all yuh want—but don't call me names. Now, start figurin' what you'll pay. I've got a hunch I can turn Lee loose and make you pay damn well."

"How much do you want?" asked Ross.

"How much?" laughed Carver. "I'll make a trade with yuh—Whizzer Lee's scalp for the Z Bar 8."

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"What? The Z Bar 8! Don't be a damn fool, Carver!"

"By to-morrow," said Carver coldly, "I'll want the bank, too."

He turned from Ross and walked back to the stable. Ross looked at the man's back as he gripped the butt of a short-gun in his coat pocket. He came near going berserk and shooting Carver in the back. It seemed the only thing left to do—kill somebody. But he stifled his anger and sauntered down to the fence, where he leaned on the top bar and tried to decide what he would do next.

After all his years of crooked work—balked by an ignorant cow-puncher! All he had left of the more than a million stolen from the Lee estate was the bank and the ranch. Not much, it is true, but enough to give him a good income for life. Not good interest on a million dollars; but you can't eat your cake and still have it. All his big investments had turned out badly. Now he *was* in a bad position.

Tommy French met Gus Linehart between the house and the stable. Tommy looked across the yard at Ross, and said to Linehart:

"The boss is kinda sour, it seems."

"What ails him?" asked Linehart.

"Oh, I dunno. Mebbe it was 'cause him and McKee had a run-in this mornin'. I reckon he was tryin' to make love to Rose. Anyway, he got kinda nasty when she wouldn't let him put his arm around her—and McKee overheard it. Man, he shore told Harvey where to head in. I heard Harvey pointin' out the fact that he owned the ranch, and McKee told him where he could take his damn ranch."

"Where's McKee now, Tommy?"

"Him and Rose went to Red Feather."

Linehart smiled sourly. "Harvey better go back East, before somebody saws his antlers off."

"That's right. Where you fellers been all night?"

"Down to Shelton."

"Hell of a wonder yuh wouldn't say somethin' to a feller."

"Be glad yuh didn't go; it's shore a dead town. I'm goin' to see if Beans will rustle us some breakfast."

IT was about noon when Jim McKee walked into the bank. Rigby was talking with his bookkeeper, but left him at once and joined McKee near the private office. Rigby looked closely at the silver shield on McKee's shirt, but said nothing until they were in the office.

"What's the meaning of that?" demanded Rigby, pointing at the silver insigne.

"Just what it says," replied McKee evenly. "I've been appointed sheriff of this county."

"Sheriff? But you can't do that, McKee."

"Why can't I?"

"What about your position at the ranch?"

"I've quit."

"You've quit the Z Bar 8? Talk sense, McKee."

"I told Harvey to take his ranch and go to hell, Rigby. Now I want a talk with you. You've known Harvey a long time. What's the matter with him? Why did he come here? Why does he hide out every time anybody comes to the ranch?"

Rigby turned a little pale. This was striking home and the angle looked dangerous.

"I don't know," he said. "You must be imagining things. Was that why you quit?"

"No, that wasn't the reason. Harvey

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got fresh with Rose, and I kinda locked horns with him. I want to know what he's doing here, Rigby."

"Your questions come a little late, McKee; you've quit."

"Looks like somethin' crooked to me."

"Don't you dare accuse me of being crooked!" exploded the banker. "If you've been appointed sheriff, why don't you apprehend Johnny Bell, instead of accusing upright citizens of being crooked?"

McKee studied Rigby for several moments. "I've always wondered just how upright you are."

The banker got to his feet and motioned toward the door.

"Get out of here! This is my private office, and I don't allow any man to talk to me that way. Keep away from me. In my opinion, they made a very bad mistake in appointing you sheriff, McKee."

Jim McKee laughed shortly and walked out. As he reached the doorway he came face to face with the man he knew as Harvey, who had decided on a desperate chance. The two men looked at each other, but neither of them spoke, and Harvey passed into the bank. McKee looked back to see him talking with the bookkeeper, and then Harvey went to the door of Rigby's private office.

CARVER, Linehart and Orme were having a siesta in the shade of the stable, when Tex Laird and Bucky Torrance of the Triple X rode in. Carver got quickly to his feet, realizing that something was wrong.

"You and yore damn tenderfoot!" snarled Tex.

"He didn't die, did he, Tex?" asked Carver anxiously.

"Die—hell! He played possum, got Tony Brownell's gun and shot Whitey Snow."

"No!"

"I tell yuh—yes! Somebody was hid on the side of the hill, and when me and Bucky and Ed Stivers tried to capture or kill him, they downed Ed and damn near leaded up all of us. I never heard so many bullets in my life."

"And he got away, Tex?"

"I'd tell a man he did! The boys hauled Whitey and Ed to Shelton."

"Both alive?"

"Nothin' to brag about. What about Harvey?"

"I've scared him stiff, and he's gone to Red Feather."

"That's all right, but didja ever stop to consider that this Lee person was playin' possum last night, and them walls are thin? Hell, he probably heard every word we said. Carver, we've got to stop that jigger's mouth, or this country will be too hot for us. Anyway, he knows where he was kept a prisoner, and he probably knows by this time who kidnaped him. If he don't, the men who helped him will."

Carver shifted nervously. "How the hell will we find him, Tex?"

"You answer that question; you got me into this deal."

"Let's go to Red Feather."

"Git yore horses."

HENRY RIGBY had been sitting at his desk, holding his head in his hands; but he looked up sharply as Kenneth Ross stepped into the office. Ross closed the door carefully and sat down opposite the banker.

"What are you doing here?" asked Rigby. "Aren't you afraid—"

The muscles of Ross's face twitched as he leaned across the desk, and his voice was husky.

"We're up against a damn black-

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mailer," he said. "You raised hell when you selected Dell Carver."

Rigby paled quickly. "What on earth do you mean by that, Ross—Harvey?"

"Never mind the names now. Carver captured Lee, and he's got him hidden somewhere. Now he demands the Z Bar 8 ranch as his price to shut Lee's mouth. You told him too much, Rigby; you've ruined things for both of us."

"Wait a minute," choked the banker. "I—I'm not in it. It was your game; I merely worked for wages."

"Wages? Damn it, Lee has that letter you wrote about the mine. You could go to jail for that. What'll we do? Carver's got us."

"What can we do? Give him the Z Bar 8 and—"

"You're crazy! Give the ranch to that damn blackmailer?"

"And I trusted Carver," wailed Rigby. "My God, I'll never trust anybody again."

"Unless our luck changes, you won't have to trust anybody."

Rigby was shaking, and his face was the color of ashes.

"My family—" he choked. "What'll I do? I can't let them—"

"Listen to me, Rigby," said Ross sharply. "Hang onto your nerve. We're still out of jail. How much money have you in the vault?"

"What do you mean, Ross? You wouldn't—"

"Do you think I'm going out of here flat broke? Lee hasn't seen me. He'd have a sweet chance proving that I'm Ross, even if he did find out that Ross had embezzled all his wealth. The deeds are all made out to Harvey. How much money, I asked you?"

"About twenty-five thousand," said Rigby hoarsely. "It would mean ruin for me, Ross; the bank wrecked. No, I can't let you—"

"Keep your nerve. I'll give you a deed to the Z Bar 8. You must have enough money of your own to make up the bank loss. I want that twenty-five thousand and I want it now. If you want to, you can say you bought the ranch. Go get a blank deed, you chicken-livered—"

"You intend to leave me to face the music, Ross?"

"I want money—all you've got in the bank."

"Well," Rigby tried to moisten his dry lips with a dry tongue, "I—I'll see if I—" His hand fumbled in the desk drawer, and jerked out, gripping a heavy Colt revolver.

Ross sprang like a panther across the desk and grappled with the half-crazed banker.

CHAPTER XIII.

"TROUBLE AHEAD!"

OUT on that old road, where Whizzer had followed the buggy tracks, Whizzer, Johnny and Lonesome were having an argument over their next move.

"I tell yuh, them tracks was made by the Z Bar 8 buckboard," insisted Lonesome. "There was one loose rear tire, and they bound it with balin' wire for about six inches. Why, yuh can even see the marks of that bound spot in the road.

"The night the bank was robbed, Dell Carver went to Shelton with their buckboard. And if he did, what was it doin' up here that same night? Why did it go over to the JB, turn around and go back? I tell yuh, Carver knows somethin'. And I'm bettin' Carver had a hand in kidnapin' Whizzer."

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"But we can't prove a damn thing," sighed Johnny.

"I know what I'm goin' to do," said Whizzer. "I'm going over to Red Feather and make old man Rigby tell what he knows."

"Keno," said Lonesome softly. "I'm goin' with yuh, feller."

Johnny looked undecided for several moments, but suddenly made up his mind.

"I'll tell yuh about me," he said. "I can't see a life of dodgin' officers. Dead or alive puts yuh in a bad position. I'm goin' in with yuh."

"You can't do that, Johnny," said Lonesome. "Don't run yore neck into a noose."

"It's a rope, a bullet or a chance to go free; and I'm takin' that one chance. C'mon. If I've got to shoot it out with somebody, I might as well do it in town as out in the brush."

They turned and rode swiftly to Red Feather. Johnny's horse was weary from the double load, but game to keep going. They came into the town past Rigby's house, and near the cottonwoods, where Johnny had been hit, they saw Rose McKee, her father, and Ella Rigby. The three of them stepped out toward the road as they recognized the three men on the two horses.

Johnny saw the glistening shield on McKee's shirt, and he drew a deep breath of astonishment.

"Hello," grinned Whizzer. "How's everybody?"

"What in the world happened to you?" asked Rose. "Your face and head are all dirty, Whizzer."

"It was good, red blood once upon a time," said Johnny. "Whizzer has been havin' a big time. Since when have you been sheriff, McKee?"

"About an hour," replied McKee softly.

"Lookin' for me?" queried Johnny.

"Jist wait a minute," interrupted Lonesome. "There ain't goin' to be no arrests for a while. McKee, do you know where Harvey is?"

"He's at the bank with Rigby; I just came from there."

"*Bueno!* We want to see him."

"What's the idea, Lonesome?"

"McKee, there's been crooked work done."

"Harvey?"

"Check. He's right where we want him. C'mon."

"Tell me somethin' about it," said McKee anxiously.

"No time now, McKee. Say! We've got to guard the rear of the bank."

"I'll cut across and come in the back," offered McKee. "Rose, you and Ella skip back to the house."

"We will not!" exclaimed Rose. "Come on, Ella."

McKEE went running across toward the rear of the bank, while the three men spurred around to the front. Carver, Linehart, Orme, Tex Laird and Bucky Torrance drew up at the Cactus Saloon as the three men dismounted in front of the bank. The street was narrow enough for each outfit to recognize the other.

"Trouble ahead!" grunted Lonesome as they trotted into the bank.

There was no one in there, except the bookkeeper, who was looking anxiously toward the door of Rigby's private office. He turned quickly and stared at the three wild looking men.

"A shot!" he blurted foolishly. "In there—a shot—a minute ago! My God, what's happened?"

The office door jerked open and Kenneth Ross started to step out. His collar had been jerked loose, necktie swung under his left ear. He saw

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Whizzer Lee and stopped dead still. Then, as suddenly as he had appeared, he jerked back and slammed the door, which shut on a spring lock.

The four men were still staring at the closed door when they heard the crashing of a glass. Lonesome ran forward, tugging at the door. From outside came a warning shout—a shot—another shot.

Men were running from the Cactus as the three friends raced out of the bank. Carver and his crowd had halted halfway across the street. Rose and Ella were but a short distance from the front of the bank.

Jim McKee came running down the alley and sprang to the sidewalk, his gun still in his hand.

"Harvey threw a chair through the window and jumped out!" he panted. "I yelled for him to stop, and he took a shot at me."

"Did he git away?" asked Lonesome.

"No-o-o, he didn't get away, Lonesome."

The crowd had halted, waiting to hear what had happened. Lonesome stepped to the edge of the sidewalk, his lean face tensed, his right hand gripping his gun. Johnny Bell swung sideways, shoving Whizzer back.

"Carver! Linehart! Orme!" Lonesome's voice snapped the names like a drill sergeant. "Hands up, you murderers!"

The order and accusation were so sudden, so unlooked for that all three men were paralyzed for a moment. Two men behind them dropped flat in the dirt, and the rest of the crowd scattered like a covey of quail.

Carver and Linehart made a move to lift their hands, but not so with Zell Orme. He was a gunman. Spitting a curse, he flashed for his gun, and at the same time he flung back his left foot as a brace. But he stepped on a man behind him in the dirt, and it threw his first bullet ten feet over Lonesome's head.

The next instant Orme pitched forward on his face, centered by a bullet from McKee's gun. Carver dropped flat in the dirt, and Johnny's first bullet smashed into the dust a foot in front of his face, splattering it with gravel and splintered lead.

Linehart, his right arm broken by a bullet, whirled and fell over a man behind him, who was hugging the dirt. The battle was over. Carver was sitting up, spitting gravel, cursing bitterly. His eyes were so full of gravel that he couldn't see to shoot. McKee quickly handcuffed him. There was no use handcuffing Linehart; and Orme wasn't going any place.

"Quit yore cussin', Carver," ordered Lonesome. "You can only blame yourself. But what we want to know is how yuh happened to kill Reese on the steps of the JB ranch. Yuh didn't pack him out there."

"Go to hell," gritted Carver.

LONESOME walked over to Linehart, who was sitting on the sidewalk, grimacing with pain from a broken arm.

"Gus," said Lonesome, "I don't know you any better than I do Carver, but I think he's a liar."

"What about?" panted Linehart.

"He says you killed the sheriff."

"Why, the dirty liar! Tryin' to pass the buck to me, eh? He shot Reese himself; shot him with the gun he took off Johnny Bell."

"Are you willin' to make a statement?" panted McKee. "Yuh might save yore own skin, yuh know, Linehart."

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"I'll talk. Git somebody to write it down."

Johnny looked at Lonesome, and there were tears in his eyes. Men were running down the alley, others going into the bank. Whizzer went stumbling down the alley, with Johnny close behind him.

Kenneth Ross was lying near the rear steps of the bank, his head and one shoulder propped against the wall. Whizzer stopped near him, looking down at the man he had trusted. A man sprang off the rear steps and ran to the crowd around Ross.

"Rigby's been shot!" he panted. "He's out, but he ain't dead."

Kenneth Ross had been hit hard; how hard he did not know.

"Well, Ross," said Whizzer hoarsely, "we both came West, eh?"

Ross nodded weakly. "I came once too often, Whizzer."

"I'm not goin' to curse you, Ross," said Whizzer. "You played crooked with me—but you didn't win. You tried to put me out of the way—and you darn near made it. You stole my money to work that mine, and then you bought the Z Bar 8 and this bank with my money."

"Yes," said Ross weakly. "I played a crooked game with you, Lee. It all belongs to you—the ranch and the bank; the rest of the money is lost."

Whizzer nodded and looked around at the crowd.

"You all hear that, don't you?" he asked.

The men nodded, hardly understanding what it was all about. The doctor shoved his way through the crowd to Ross.

"Gawd, what a clean-up!" snorted Tex Laird. "I'll buy a drink for the crowd, bein' as it's all over."

Whizzer whirled around and jerked out his gun. Two short steps, and he sank the muzzle into Tex's waist line.

"Over?" snapped Whizzer. "You darn crook, I own the Z Bar 8 now, and those were my cows you stole. Keep 'em up!"

Laird's hands went up, and he turned pale.

"Wh-what cows?" he stuttered.

"The ones that Carver and his gang sold to you on a forged bill of sale."

Tex Laird drew a deep breath and shook his head.

"That lyin' Carver said you was a dumb tenderfoot."

"How much hell does a man have to go through in this country before his feet get tough?" asked Whizzer.

McKee stepped in and relieved Whizzer.

"You can't pin anythin' on me," said Tex. "I'm safe."

"You should have told Bucky Torrence to keep his mouth shut," replied McKee. "Lonesome caught him tryin' to make a sneak, and he caved in."

Whizzer staggered over to where the doctor was trying to work on Ross. The reaction made Whizzer dizzy. He dropped on his knees beside Ross and whispered swiftly in his ear. Ross was very sick, but he understood.

Whizzer got to his feet. Rose and Ella had stopped at the back door of the bank. Ella was crying. Rose left her and came to Whizzer. Another doctor was working on Rigby, and he had ordered every one out of the room.

WHIZZER looked at Rose and shook his head. He didn't know what to say to her.

"What happened to Mr. Rigby?" asked Rose. Johnny looked at Ross for an answer. The lawyer smiled weakly, a painful grimace, as the doctor fumbled with a bandage.

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"Any chance, doc?" he asked. The old doctor drew a deep breath.

"If you have anything to say—say it," replied the doctor meaningly.

Kenneth Ross swallowed painfully.

"It's all right," he said. "I robbed Whizzer Lee out of his inheritance; gambled most of it away. The Z Bar 8 belongs to him, as does the bank. That's all there is left of a million. I admit that I offered Carver ten thousand dollars to kill Lee.

"Carver kidnaped Lee, and was holding him as a threat against me. Carver demanded the Z Bar 8 as a price for killing Lee. How Lee escaped, I do not know. I was desperate; so I came here and tried to force Rigby to give me all the money in the bank. I—I knew the game was played out, and I wanted a get-away stake. Rigby drew a gun to protect himself and the bank; but we fought for the gun, and I shot him. That's the whole story."

Rose turned and went hurriedly to Ella. Kenneth Ross had absolved Rigby. Whizzer had asked him to do it for Ella's sake. Whizzer turned and bumped into Mush Edwards, the marshal, who had been going from one group to another, trying to straighten things out to his own satisfaction.

"I'd like to make somebody stand still long enough to tell me what this is all about," complained the marshal. "Four men shot, one man blinded and one other man dyin'—and nobody tellin' me what it's all about. That ain't no way to do. I'm marshal and I—"

"Go shoot somebody," advised Whizzer weakly. "It's great sport."

"Who'd you shoot?" asked Edwards.

"I don't know his name."

Whizzer wandered back to the street. He saw Ella and Rose and Johnny farther up the sidewalk, talking excitedly. Some men came from the bank, carrying Rigby home on a cot. They were saying that Rigby would live; that he was more shocked than injured.

Whizzer felt dizzy and sick. He could see a large group down at the sheriff's office. It had been a big day in Red Feather. Whizzer rather marveled at the things he had done—and still lived. Most of it was like a nightmare; and he wondered if it was.

His legs were weak, so he sat down on the sidewalk and tried to keep things in focus as much as possible. Some one sat down beside him on the high board sidewalk, but he paid no attention.

"Johnny went home with Ella."

Whizzer turned his head and saw Rose McKee sitting beside him. He blinked slowly, shook his head.

"Oh, hello," he said foolishly.

"Whizzer, you look awfully sick," said Rose.

"Gee, I'm all right."

"No, you are not right. Is it your sore head?"

"I guess it's my tender feet. Do you like scrambled brains?"

"I hate them, Whizzer."

"Sorry—that's what I've got. I—I can't think straight."

"You thought straight enough to ask Harvey to say that Mr. Rigby was innocent of wrong."

"Rose, never mention that. No use making things bad for Ella and her mother. And Johnny loves Ella—almost as much as I—Rose, I do love you. I've loved you ever since the day I found that pic—"

And Whizzer slid down in a faint.

"AIN'T that a hell of a way to propose to a girl?" grunted Lonesome, as he stepped off the sidewalk and picked Whizzer up. Lonesome had come up unobserved. He

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placed Whizzer on the sidewalk and held tightly to his shoulders.

"Lonesome, he's fainted!" gasped Rose.

"Yes'm, it shore looks that-away. Oh-oh! Wakin' up right away."

He sat Whizzer on the sidewalk, where Whizzer blinked foolishly.

"I—I must have passed out," he whispered. Johnny came running up.

"Rigby will live," he panted. "Bullet went high. Gee, what a day! Lonesome, you old high-pockets! Without a darn bit of evidence, you called 'em. Without ace, face or trump, you called 'em—and they laid down. My Gawd! And they was offerin' a thousand cold dollars for me, dead or alive. Linehart's writin' a confession for the prosecutin' attorney."

Lonesome grinned happily. "Johnny, I didn't have a pair in my hand, did I? Why, no jury on earth would ever convict on the evidence we had. I just used Injun psychology on 'em."

"Injun psychology?"

"A war-whoop and a surprise attack. When I yelled their names, I scared the devil out of 'em."

"That's right," admitted Johnny. "It was wonderful. I'm only sorry about one thing; I'm losin' my pardner. Whizzer owns the big Z Bar 8, and he won't have no time for the little JB."

"You took me in, Johnny," said Whizzer. "It was the big JB to me. We'll put 'em together and make one outfit; fifty-fifty—still pardners. And we'll make Lonesome Wolf foreman of the combined layout."

"What are you goin' to do, Whizzer?" asked Lonesome.

"Me?" Whizzer staggered to his feet and put one arm around Rose.

"What am I going to do? Why, I'm going to get married."

Rose blushed, but did not deny it. Lonesome grinned slowly.

"The joker was plumb wild for a while; but I'll betcha he'll git tamed down pretty soon."

The doctor, who had been working on Kenneth Ross, came hurrying down past them, but stopped and looked sharply at Whizzer's head.

"Young man," he said briskly, "your head needs fixing."

"You're too late, doc," grinned Lonesome. "The young lady has already accepted him."

The doctor looked vacantly at him for a moment, burst out laughing, slapped Whizzer on the shoulder and went hurrying down the street.

Whizzer looked around, drew a deep breath and smiled at Rose.

"Well, it—it was rather a mess, all the way around," he said. "But we had a wonderful day for it."

"Wonderful," replied Rose simply.

THE END.

SPEAKING OF WESTERN STORIES—

There are some fine ones "on the fire" for the next few weeks: "The Whip Hand," one of Erle Stanley Gardner's real and unforgettable "*Whispering Tales*" of the desert; Three Mounted Tramps," a range war novel by J. E. Grinstead; and stories by Robert Ormond Case, W. C. Tuttle, and other favorites.

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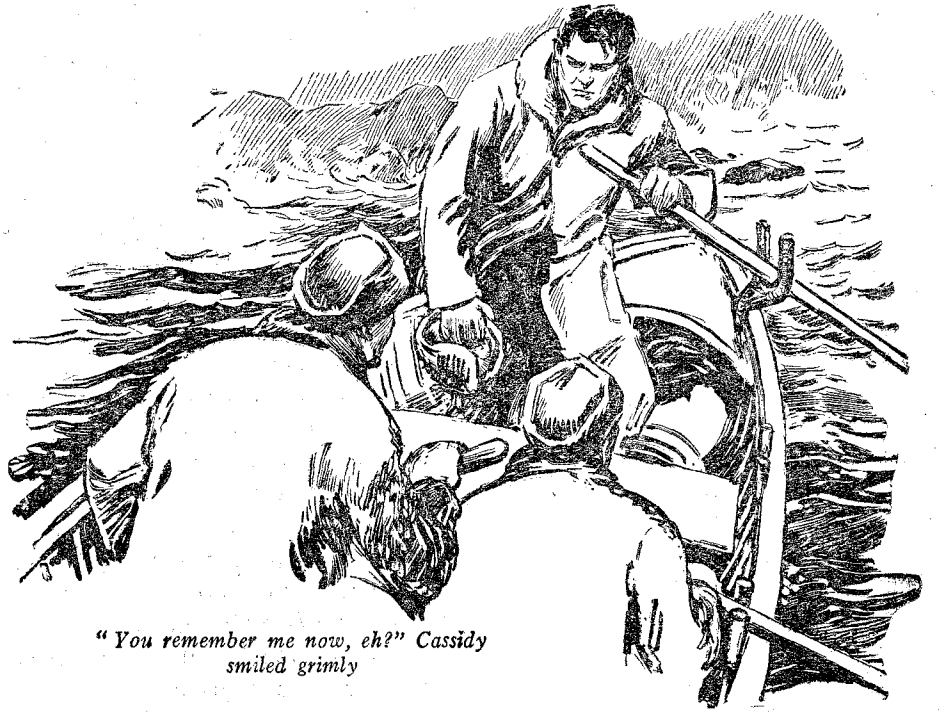

"You remember me now, eh?" Cassidy smiled grimly

Cassidy's Bluff

"It's too dark to run the rapids in safety," the other Klondike pilots said—but Cassidy had a reason for taking a chance with those two passengers

By ROBERT ORMOND CASE

A CLUSTER of small boats, Klondike-bound, were drawn up on the narrow strip of sand hard by the cleft that marked the entrance to Box Cañon. A few adventurers had gone forward on foot to appraise the first stretch of the rapids that formed the final and sinister threshold to the golden door. These stood close together, insect-like on the face of giant dimensions, looking down into the depths. But the bulk of the gold-seekers, on the strip of sand beneath the wall, formed a milling group in whose center were the three seasoned pilots of Whitehorse.

Though it was early in the great stampede, in deference to the growing row of crosses marking the resting places of those who had lost their hold on the mane of Whitehorse, the Mounties had established the rule that experienced pilots must accompany all craft that put forth into the grim current. Three such had been designated, white-water boatmen who knew each trick of the savage current, each sullen eddy and hidden rock.

A whim of chance and the lure of the greatest gold strike of all time had brought these three adventurers together. There was Geroux, a swash-

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buckling, jovial giant from the Canadian wilds who had here turned aside from the lure of the pay creeks, the reckless heart of him instantly reacting to the challenge of Whitehorse.

There was "the Duke"—true name neither asked nor given—a ramrod person, stiffly erect, whose Oxford accent and stilted manner were less significant of inner caliber than his careless creed: "Sporting, y'know."

And there was "Long Chance" Cassidy, a little man with a mild voice and shy, unwinking eyes.

They stood together in the center of the group, these three, in the deepening twilight. The stampeders were bidding for the services of a pilot. This was according to established custom, there being no fixed rates. The highest bidder went through first; the others in order. Those who were able to pay, paid high. Oftentimes, when the spirit moved him, one of the trio would ride down with indigent persons who had no gold to offer, but whose burning eagerness, at the last threshold, it was not human to deny.

Geroux and the Duke, being weary from many crowded hours, had offered the opinion that it was now too dark for another trip. Cassidy had agreed, which made it final. Thus the bidding, which became more spirited with each savage gust belching down the gash, was for the first trip at dawn.

"Fifteen!"

"Twenty-five!"

"Here goes my last cent," bellowed a reckless giant. "Klondike or bust! Twenty-eight."

"Better starve in Dawson than freeze on the river," stated another. "Thirty bucks and my stack's in."

"*Himmel!*" groaned a little man, plucking nervously at his luxuriant black beard. "For ten minutes' work, we should pay such prices? Thirty-five and no more. I vill swim first."

THE giant Geroux grinned, enjoying himself hugely. Twelve dollars per trip had been the average during previous weeks. This eleventh-hour madness would certainly swell the coffers of the syndicate. The Duke merely waited, aloof and detached as always. Cassidy looked past the group as the whipsawed gunwale of a heavily laden boat rasped harshly on the sand.

It was a party of three. A huge man bulked in the stern, his shaggy coat causing him to loom like a grizzly. Another bulky one squatted amidships, all but hidden in mountainous equipment. A more slender figure, likewise swathed in furs, was perched in the bow.

Thrusting powerfully, he of the stern warped the boat alongside, shipped his sweep, rose up and leaped ashore. He bore down upon the group, bearded jaw outthrust.

His bold, somewhat prominent eyes lighted knowingly as he caught the meaning of the tableau.

"What's this?" he boomed, elbowing into the circle. "Bidding for a pilot, eh? Now wait. Don't close any deal. Whatever the last offer was, it's raised."

Having seen many stampeders pass, the trio instantly recognized the type. Not brawn or luck, but the power of cash in hand, had enabled this booming one and his party to penetrate speedily and in comparative comfort into the harshest environment of a continent. Toilers on the dreary Pass, no doubt, had seen his hired packers troop by, their tons of costly equipment achieving the summit in days instead of weeks.

Some hopeful worker at desolate

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Bennett had fashioned this sturdy boat, laboring through interminable hours; and then, for a price, had sold his chance to reach Dawson.

Such was the power of gold, even on a wilderness trail.

The confidence of that power was with the big man now. He thrust himself before the trio and stood on legs firmly planted, staring defiantly at the other bidders.

Geroux beamed upon his cronies, his grin widening. A ghost of a sardonic smile played about the Duke's thin lips. Cassidy, meeting the bulky one's arrogant gaze at close range, pulled the protecting visor of his cap lower over his eyes and cast a searching glance at the slender figure in the bow of the boat.

"Well, well," said the newcomer, rubbing his mittened hands together impatiently. "Let's proceed. Didn't I hear thirty-five mentioned as we pulled in? I'm offering sixty."

He glared about the circle. The last bidder shrugged his shoulders, palms upraised, and shook his head. The others stared back stolidly.

"We have finish', then," said Geroux, his white teeth flashing. "The first trip in the morning, eet is yours."

"Morning?" echoed the bulky one. He snorted wrathfully. "Nonsense. We're going now. There's plenty of light. Why wait till morning?"

GEROUX did not deign to make reply. The Duke said nothing. Cassidy had been scrutinizing the boat fixedly through the twilight. He now drew the collar of his mackinaw closer about his chin, as though in protection against the keen-edged gusts, and put a mild question.

"You've got a woman there, haven't you?"

"My niece, sir. And her future husband. But don't worry about them. What I say, goes. They agreed to take their chances with me, if I'd bring them along. Man, we're in a hurry!" Disregarding Cassidy, he again addressed Geroux.

"We're willing to pay for it. We've planned on it. We'll camp somewhere below. Seventy dollars to take us through to-night."

"Bah!" said Geroux.

"Eighty!" said the big man.

"Pardon," interposed the Duke. "You haven't grasped the point. We've decided—"

But Cassidy raised his hand. Least of the three though he appeared to be, his gesture halted further discussion.

"I think," he said, peering almost quizzically at the towering Geroux, "that there's plenty of light. If he's sure he wants to chance it. Yes, I'll take him through."

"O. K.," said Geroux. The Duke nodded.

"No, you don't," blustered the big man. He pointed a mittened hand at Geroux. "When I pay best prices I'm entitled to the best man. Here's my choice."

Geroux stared, open-mouthed. The Duke's frosty eyes twinkled. Cassidy merely regarded him unwinkingly.

"Ho!" bellowed Geroux, smiting his thigh. "You buy dose pilot by hees size, eh? On ze hoof, yes? Because hee's small you t'ink hee's no good? Bah, it ees to laugh!" He placed an affectionate hand on Cassidy's frail shoulder. "You beeg bum chechacho, hees name, it is Long Chance. In the white water he ees the boss wolf. W'en he says he take you through, eet's finish'. You go wit' heem, or walk."

The bulky one was not taken aback by this public rebuke. He ogled Cassidy

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with the complacence of one who has made an unexpectedly good purchase, and nodded briskly.

"All right, then." He jerked a thumb toward the boat. "Let's go."

The trio followed in leisurely fashion to the water's edge, the spectators at heel.

"You'll have to trim her better," said Cassidy, inspecting the craft. "She's top-heavy. And the bow's too low. Put the boxes on the bottom. And those heavy bags. Tie down the loose stuff so it won't float. Leave room on each side, here, for you two. I'll take the sweep."

"Must we shift all this duffle?" complained the big man with a questioning scowl. "It 'll take a half hour. You've already claimed it was too dark."

"He's showing his authority," stated the one in the boat. He was a massive youth, whose heavy, sullen features had been mortified rather than hardened by the rigors of the Pass. They were swollen and bristling; and through watery eyes he peered balefully at Cassidy.

"The boat 'll ride all right. We came down through the lake, didn't we? They told us that when we were afloat the hard work was over. I'm damned if I'll move."

A DISAPPROVING murmur arose from the crowd. Incredulous amazement was depicted on the circle of faces, and a species of awe. Geroux's grin widened.

"*Dieu!*" he stated frankly. "An' t'ings like dese have come as far as Lindemann!"

But the girl hastened to pour oil on troubled waters.

"Nonsense," she said, addressing the youth. "We'll do exactly as he says. He knows what's best. It won't take long. I'll help you."

"No," said Cassidy. "Excuse me, lady. But you'd best start out now. Down the trail. You understand that you must walk, of course? We don't take ladies through."

"Must I walk?" queried the girl, taken aback in her turn. "Really, I'd much prefer—"

"It isn't far."

"I didn't mean that," she said hastily. "It's just that I object to being catered to. I'm not afraid."

"I'm sure you're not," said Cassidy. "But the rule's already established. The trail's plain beyond the first rise. Just follow the river. Wait for us below the big whirlpool. Come, I'll get you started. I'll see you past the gap while they're trimming the boat."

Under his peremptory gesture, she clambered from the boat. He laid hold of her arm and they departed forthwith into the driving gloom.

Grumbling, the two bulky ones labored with the equipment. From time to time the younger man cast a sullen glance toward Cassidy and the girl, mounting above the gorge. Tiny they stood in silhouette on the crest. Cassidy was talking.

He gestured once toward the south. The girl placed her hand on his arm, standing close.

"These guides!" growled the disgruntled youth, puffing at his labors. "Blast their smug airs! A little authority goes to their heads. They boss the men and strut before the women. I'll give that underfed hero a piece of my mind before we're through. See if I don't."

"Shut up," admonished the other. "We've got to handle these lads with gloves. Wait till we get through the rapids. After we've paid him off—

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then you can ease your mind and no harm done."

SOON Cassidy returned alone. He inspected the boat briefly and nodded. He waved the bulky ones to their places. Yet he did not immediately take his own position at the stern. Geroux and the Duke drew him a little apart.

The spectators had scattered, seeking higher ground. An urge more elemental than mere curiosity impelled them to witness the departure. Each, on the morrow, would launch forth into the same roaring trail.

"Cassidy," said Geroux, "w'y you go down to-night?"

"Don't mean to intrude, of course," said the Duke apologetically.

They stood close, heads inclined together.

"I'll tell you why," said Cassidy. "I knew this pair. I heard they were coming. That's why I've been here all the while. If they came, they must pass this way. They haven't recognized me yet. But they will—before we're through."

He met the gaze of each in turn.

Geroux whistled softly.

"Duke," said Cassidy, "and you, Geroux. We've seen plenty together. Many brothers haven't been as close. This is between the three of us. You and I know it isn't too dark. We could run it blindfolded. But if I don't make it through with these pilgrims"—he spoke significantly—"it's because it's too dark. It was against my better judgment, but they insisted. *Kumtux?*"

"Jove!" breathed the Duke.

"Dose b e e g bums!" whispered Geroux, entranced. "Sometime, mebbe, they have steal your treasure, eh? But no, I ask no questions. Wit' me, eet is O. K."

"And with me," said the Duke. "Your reasons are sufficient."

"Are you coming?" demanded the big man in the boat. "You talked a lot about how dark it's getting. Still you stand there—"

"Geroux," said Cassidy, disregarding his employer utterly, "you've loved a woman once, eh?"

"Ha!" said Geroux, rolling his eloquent eyes skyward and pressing a hamlike hand upon his chest. "Wiz ze grand passion. My heart, she is bust'. Many times."

"And you, Duke. At some time or another you have suffered a blow to your pride. Perhaps disgrace. I won't ask how. Or when. But you and I know that there are some things worse than death."

"Correct," said the Duke.

"Let's go!" bawled the wrathful giant. "By gad, sir—"

"You two shall be the judges," said Cassidy. "Talk straight. If you had met the two men who stole your woman and ruined your life, what would you do then?"

"Pouf!" said Geroux simply, raising his palms. "Eet is finish'. They die."

"And I would say," said the Duke, "that Fate had delivered them into your hands. For a purpose."

"So long, then," said Cassidy, turning away. "We may make it through, you understand. If not—"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"*Salut!*" said Geroux, his white teeth gleaming.

"Good hunting," said the Duke.

CASSIDY pushed the heavy boat from shore, wading. When the current laid ghostly hands upon it, he clambered into place and grasped the sweep.

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"Hold it," he directed the oarsmen. "Pull hard upstream. We've got to hit the gap on the far side. The first swing in the cañon's to the left."

The shore line was creeping by, the foam-choked cleft approaching. The bulky ones wrought excitedly and their progress was stayed a little. They drifted out and out. Through the cleft, for the first time, the awesome down chute came fairly into view.

"Hold it," said Cassidy. His voice was mild. "Carson, do you remember me? No, don't stop," he admonished, as both stiffened in their seats to stare at him, their oars poised. "Pull hard." He removed his cap and ran his fingers through his hair, smiling grimly. "You remember me now, eh, Carson?"

"Gad!" breathed the older man, eyes bulging. "It's Cassidy!"

The bulky youth stared for a moment, his heavy features flabby with astonishment. Then his oar thrust deep. The stout wood groaned beneath the convulsive effort.

"Turn back," he urged his companion in a shaken voice. "You think we'll let *him* take us through? Cassidy? Pull for the shore!"

"Too late," said Cassidy. "Hold it! No boat ever passed this point and turned back." Kneeling, he swung the sweep in a great arc that held the craft in the current despite the fury of the other's effort. "That's right. Ship your oars."

The bulky ones obeyed. Even to inexperienced eyes it was plain that there was now no turning back. Watchers on the sand were tiny in the rear. The cleft loomed more massive, approaching at express train speed. Sullen thunders from the gorge grew louder against the wind.

"What's the meaning of this, Cassidy?" demanded the big man. "You wouldn't let those others pilot us. You insisted on taking us through yourself. What do you want from us?"

"A price," said Cassidy.

The walls thrust beyond them like hungry arms. The center of the current, heaped high, was crested by huge, upstanding waves. Into the first of these the boat plunged in a smother of foam, swung dizzily into the trough, rose up to a lashing crest. Through a nightmare illusion born of warring forces, it seemed that the boat—frail as an eggshell now—was shuttled only in a vertical plane, while savage walls charged by.

Five times they surged down into an engulfing abyss and rose again. Then the streaming walls shifted. A new vista opened before them. They were speeding forward on an upboiling current that broke and eddied about them with the sheen of molten glass; and far down through the twilight, huge rocks sped toward them, splitting the surface.

Equipment was awash in the boat. It rode heavily, with a sullen momentum. Grasping the sides with desperate grip, the bulky ones huddled. Their bulging eyes were glued on the rocks ahead.

"We'll never make it alive!" bellowed the youth. "We haven't got a Chinaman's chance. He tried to wreck us back yonder. Man, look at those rocks!"

KNEELING at the sweep, Cassidy warped the bow over so that their course lay dead upon the foremost crag. Here the current split apart in great curling waves, and as they leaped down upon what appeared to be certain destruction the two flung up their arms before their eyes.

The boat rose up drunkenly, slid off into depths, shot skyward again in the

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opposite direction and emerged upon a long expanse where shreds and islands of foam tossed alongside in what appeared to be quiet water. Yet the walls raced dizzily by and new thunders smote upon the air.

"Two more bends in the cañon," said Cassidy. "Three minutes to talk. You hear that thundering sound? That's Whitehorse."

"You can't wreck us," said Carson, hoarsely. "You'll drown, too."

"No," said Cassidy. "I'm one of the few men who have crashed in Whitehorse and lived. That's why they call me Long Chance. I can do it again."

"The Mounties 'll take you. They'll know it's framed."

"On the contrary," said Cassidy. "I know the exact riffle where you'll both come to rest. Below the whirlpool. Even Dolly will believe me a hero when I drag your bodies in. A magnificent effort, you understand. But in vain."

"A thousand," said Carson, between his teeth. "You're young, Cassidy. Two thousand to take us through!"

"Five thousand," croaked the youth. "I've got it. In gold notes. In my belt—"

Cassidy shook his head, smiling. "Money?" he said. "Cash? Is that the only language you know?"

"What then?" pleaded Carson. "Man, give it a name. What's your price?"

Through new chaos the boat plunged, groaning. It shook itself free in a long, foaming chute whose dim dimensions were composed only of driving walls, tossing waves and the glittering sky. Far down in the shadow-choked depths, at the bend, the river was cleft as cleanly as by a knife; and beyond that terrific break loomed crests and mountains of foam as white as snow.

"Carson," said Cassidy, raising his voice. "And you, Benchley. Listen close. We've only two minutes to go. You ask me my price, eh? It was a ridiculous question. You know the record. Is there any other way to square it except to wipe it clean?"

"You can't," said Carson, licking his lips. "It isn't human. Is there no mercy in you?"

"There is," said Cassidy. "The same mercy you showed me. And Dolly. She trusted me, Carson. She believed in me. You destroyed that faith. Deliberately. You were afraid, when she came of age, that you wouldn't have your grasping hands on her estate. So you and Benchley—"

"He made me do it," wailed that cowering youth. "It was his idea—Carson's—"

"You yellow pup!" said Carson between his teeth. "Turn on me, will you—"

"Don't argue," said Cassidy. "It's music, but we haven't time. Yonder's Whitehorse. Benchley, you swore in court that you didn't hire me to move Carson's cattle up to Stony Meadows. Carson swore he knew nothing about it. The jury knew that I needed money, that Carson was threatening foreclosure. Everybody in the cow country knew that there was bad blood between us.

"Only the three of us knew that Carson was trying to crush me, to blacken my character, to get me out of the way so he could still control Dolly, and Dolly's estate. You were his tool, Benchley. Even with Dolly. You knew it then. You know it now. There's still time to admit the truth. Don't perjure yourself here. This is a court from which there's no appeal. Talk straight. And fast."

"Shut up!" interposed Carson. "Not

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a word, Benchley! Sit tight. If he wrecks us, what does he gain? He dies, too, and the record still stands. He's out on a limb. It's a bluff—"

"Bluff?" said Cassidy. "Carson, listen close. You've played a little poker. You've never before matched stacks with a lad who's got nothing to lose. You're doing it now. Look—here's Whitehorse! Bluff, eh? Hang on!"

THE current, hurtling down through the gap with the momentum built up by the long down chute, roared forth upon a still steeper incline. Into a channel less than a third of the river's previous width the boat plunged, and the resultant battle of elements, glimpsed briefly in the deepening gloom, presented a visual spectacle that was terrific beyond description.

At the whim of immeasurable forces, it seemed, natural laws had been cast aside. Fully eight feet higher in the center than on the sides of the channel, the water was heaped in a madness of motion. Along this ridge loomed mountains of foam, stiff and upstanding, each in the same unvarying place.

This was the mane of Whitehorse; and rolling thunderously from those incredible crests, the current, to the left, was sucked down and down into turbulent depths. That way lay certain death. Shreds of equipment or fragments of splintered boats—buoyant articles that had withstood the battering of warring forces in the chill abyss—might appear on the far, quiescent reaches of the lower river. But voyageurs themselves, having turned aside here, must join a ghostly company in some dark, unplumbed cavern from whence there was no return.

And to the right, midway down the length of the rapids, where constantly wrestling giants of the Yukon had worn a circular basin in living rock, a huge eddy swung in stately march, like a great wheel turning. Unruffled were the waters of this concave depression. Its burnished sides gleamed. Shreds of foam were startlingly white by contrast to a blackness as of obsidian. Calm and placid to the eye, it seemed; a haven sheltered from the fury of the raging channel.

Yet Carson and Benchley, glimpsing it in the reeling instant ere they plunged into the depths, knew it for what it was. Tales of luckless boatmen caught in its grip had come back over the Trail. Here, too, so legend affirmed, was doom as certain as on the left, but more cruel and tantalizing in that annihilation did not come suddenly.

Helpless craft had been known to swing twice, thrice, even five times around the great circle before being flung again into the raging crests, there to be engulfed and lost.

It was a photographic instant, no more, that they grasped the picture. There was no time to speculate on Cassidy's course, to explore the iron of his determination, to calculate the odds that he would make his bluff good. Thought processes were suspended. Life itself seemed to hang in the balance as the ponderous boat crashed down in a welter of foam and the manes of the wild horses were white against the driving gloom.

Blinding spray lashed their faces. The thunder of the gorge, in a sustained note, belched as from the sky. Impact followed on terrific impact. The boat leaped up, groaning, and crashed anew. It seemed that the craft must be parted beneath them, their very bodies torn asunder; and suddenly, at the powerful urge of Cassidy's

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sweep, they swung down to the right and so into placid waters.

AT first, in the cessation of motion, it was as though they had successfully run the gantlet and Whitehorse was behind them. Benchley sat dazed, head bowed. It was Carson who grasped the truth. He peered about him, dashed a dripping hand across his eyes and peered again.

Islands of foam moved lazily near by. The water was black with depth. A huge segment of wall, low and worn smooth by countless ages of erosion, swung dizzily by. The channel followed; the crested waves; the wall again. High overhead, the stars wheeled in a majestic circle.

"Gad!" Carson breathed. "You did it, Cassidy! You took us into the whirlpool!"

The words were torn from his lips, utterly lost in the never-ending thunders about him.

Yet Cassidy's voice, pitched in a higher key, was plain.

"Bluffing, eh, Carson?"

The pull of the whirlpool, like the silent attraction of a magnet, was toward the center. Here, at intervals, the surface was unbroken. Again, as Carson watched, hypnotized, the hub became a twisting, swirling, shadow-choked well of blackness into which the dark waters poured as into a funnel; and from those nameless depths came a sucking, throaty sound, muffled and bestial.

Yet the very forces that had created the giant eddy tended to hold the craft in suspension. The pull of the current was toward the center, but centrifugal force hurled floating objects outward. Thus the boat did not approach the terrific vortex toward which, from all directions, the glistening surface sloped; but crept gradually outward with each succeeding swing.

"Benchley," said Cassidy, "are you ready to talk now?"

"Shut up!" admonished Carson, as the youth nodded, licking his lips. "We're done for, you fool! Don't give him the satisfaction. Damn you, Cassidy—"

"You're stubborn," said Cassidy, smiling. "There's still a chance. Does it look good to you?"

"He's lying," said Carson. His bulging eyes were glued on Cassidy's face. "We're done for, I tell you!"

Benchley looked about him, shuddering. Once more they swung by the tossing manes and so into the lee of the wall. His grip closed convulsively upon the rough sides of the boat.

"Don't try it," said Cassidy, shaking his head. "Those walls look close, but they're a long ways away. No handholds there. No crack or crevice. Benchley, who hired me to move those cattle to Stony Meadows?"

"I did!" said Benchley. "Man, get us out of here!"

"Carson," said Cassidy, his dripping sweep poised above the reflected stars through which they moved, "down in the valley you sold the world on the theory that I was of no force—a weakling, yellow, a cattle thief. You persuaded the jury and the court—and Dolly. You lied, eh?"

"I lied," said Carson.

"That's all," said Cassidy. His voice rang with triumph. The boat swung sullenly to the thrust of the sweep. "Here we go!"

UP the glistening wall they swung. Mountains of foam crested beside them, engulfed them. Again impact succeeded shuddering impact; spray was as the lash of icy whips; and

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in that instant when all seemed lost the boat surged forth from chaos into placid water.

Here a great, foam-spangled eddy drifted lazily by a shelving ledge, and against this the craft grated softly to a stop.

Cassidy shipped his sweep, wrung the water from his cap, stood up and stretched himself. He stepped ashore, cast a searching glance at a shadowed cleft hard by the ledge, and turned back to the boat. Benchley and Carson were hunched in their places, still in the grip of the terrific moments just past.

"Whitehorse is behind you," said Cassidy. "You're Klondike-bound. You can pay me now."

The pair arose then, and clambered ashore.

Almost fearfully they looked about them, at the solid rock underfoot, at smooth water beckoning down river, at the glittering sky.

These things were real; and as they eyed Cassidy fixedly through the gloom they appeared to swell in dimensions, to gain arrogant force.

"How much?" said Carson, with a leer at Benchley. "Don't try to hold us to any ridiculous offers we made back yonder. Don't imagine that because we got nervous—"

"Eighty dollars," said Cassidy. "That was the last figure mentioned before we started through. I wouldn't charge you anything, except for Geroux and the Duke. We split our earnings. Personally"—his manner was apologetic—"I've been paid plenty."

"Bah!" said Carson. He counted out the amount in gold. "You had the whip hand over us back yonder, Cassidy. We're in the clear now. You have no witnesses to any admissions we may have made in the hysteria of the moment—"

"Why discuss it?" interposed Benchley. "We're out of those infernal rapids. To blazes with him. He is through."

"Carson, Carson!" Cassidy shook his head smilingly. "And you, Benchley. Are you *that* low? Five minutes ago, facing death, you talked straight. Benchley admitted the frame-up about the cattle. You, Carson, admitted lying to Dolly. Are you denying it now?"

"No witnesses, my boy," said Carson, grinning broadly. "It's just between the three of us."

THEN the grin froze on his bearded lips; for at Cassidy's gesture, the girl stepped forth from the black cleft in the wall at their shoulders.

"It's between the four of us," said Cassidy. "And the rest of the world doesn't matter . . . You heard their denials, Dolly. Do you believe *now* what I told you up yonder? When they were getting the boat ready for the rapids?"

"Yes," said the girl. "I believed you then."

"I'm sorry," said Cassidy, "that I doubted you these long years. Since I left the Valley. But there was only one letter. The one in which you said you were going to persuade your uncle to come to the Klondike—"

"Damn you!" growled Carson. "It was a frame-up from the start, eh? Listen, you rat! Suppose you hadn't been able to bring us out of the whirlpool, what then?"

"The whirlpool?" Cassidy smiled. "That was the only part of it that was bluff, Carson. We always take the big boats, with the heavy loads, through the whirlpool. It lessens the danger of

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capsizing on the lower stretch. If you know where to hit the mane, you're O. K. I'll admit I took you around a couple of times more than usual. But I had to give Dolly plenty of time. So she could be waiting here . . . Good-by, all. I'll be trailing down to Dawson after the freeze-up, Dolly. May I see you there?"

"Of course," said the girl. Even in the gloom, her radiant smile was of the type that laughs away the memory of lonely years and bitter trails. "That's why I came North."

THE END.

A Real Snake Temple

A PECULIAR snake temple exists in the interior of Penang in the East Indies, and yet the temple itself is dedicated by the Chinese to the worship of Buddha. Perhaps it was because Buddha frowned on all taking of life that the serpents which have taken possession of the place are undisturbed.

Worshipers visit the temple at night because the snakes are then absent on hunting expeditions for rats and frogs. At dawn the reptiles return and may be found twined in the branches of the dwarfed trees and among the lacquered boxes and candlesticks with which the Chinese decorate their altars. Well-fed serpents are lethargic and the priests who officiate say that those which infest the strange shrine are harmless, but cases where worshipers who came too early or stayed too late have been bitten are recorded.

Penang is notoriously a region infested with cobras, and foreigners who visit the snake temple are extremely careful. In contrast to the custom practiced in certain Indian temples, the Penang snakes are not the recipients of goat milk offerings. They must hustle for themselves.

Certain castes of Hindus believe that a person dying of snake bite can be saved by the efforts of a *yogi* or priest. If this individual will chant certain passages from the Hindu Bible over the victim the snake will be induced to return and withdraw its venom. The passages are known as *mantaras*.

The Ooriyas, natives of Orissa, a province on the east coast of India, are veritable serpent worshipers. They are said to possess the power to bring back to life an animal which has recently died of snake bite.

Charles Adams.

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"Ice! Ice!" the half-mad seaman was shouting

Sole Survivor

Mystery still hid the fate of Sven Johansen and his Arctic explorers, a mystery whose key was known only to a dog

By JOHN STANFORD
Author of "Mute Evidence," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

THE LOST EXPLORERS.

THE Sole Survivor! A name to conjure with, and the big gray Eskimo dog bore it proudly. It gave him certain privileges that none of the other Northland dogs enjoyed.

When their masters—Alaskan mining men, Territorial officials and explorers—brought the dogs "outside," they were usually parked out in boarding stables. Not so, the Sole Survivor. He shared the comforts of Seattle's well-known Arctic Club with the men. And at the present moment, he appeared to be enjoying them.

His short-coupled, solid body was stretched out on the most expensive rug in the club's lounge. It was his favorite spot. Just under the big moose head, and beside one of the deep, comfortable chairs.

A gray-haired man came out of the library with a book under his arm. He seated himself in the big chair. With a look that might be interpreted as one of disgust, the dog got up and moved

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a few feet away. He chose a spot from which he could see the big front door without having to look around a pair of legs.

Some one came in. The dog's pointed muzzle lifted from between his paws. He surveyed the new arrival across a corner of the entrance lobby with expectancy in his Mongol-slanted hazel eyes. Then his nose dropped back. It twitched a little as a whiff of salt-laden breeze swept across the floor.

Outside, the wind whipped off of Puget Sound and whistled through the narrow cañons of Seattle's hillside streets. Like a voice from afar, it called to the Eskimo dog. Again his nose twitched.

There was life out there where that wind was born. Sea gulls circled and shrieked above the green waters that whipped themselves to white froth on rocky shores. Wild animals skulked the beaches in search of food. The tall fir and spruce sang under the strum of the same wind that full-bellied the sails of ships with towering masts reaching high into the leaden heavens.

The dog knew that some of those ships would be heading north with bones in their teeth. Heading for Alaska. Heading for his home. His feet itched for the feel of the trail. His ears were hungry for the scream of saw-steel sled runners on the sandy, midwinter snow. A harness, though it marked him as a beast of burden, would now be a badge of freedom.

ABRUPTLY the brass latch of the door clicked. The Eskimo dog's small ears wedged up into points. His bushy, plume-like tail curled more tightly over his broad back. His full-muscled legs tensed, and his strong nails dug deep into the rich nap of the rug. His compact body was drawn up in preparation for a spring.

A large man stepped into the lobby, accompanied by a shouting gust of wintry wind. His modish double-breasted

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overcoat failed to hide the athletic solidness of him. His body tapered down from the great width of his shoulders, across muscle-padded ribs, encircling his deep chest, to the lean flanks and narrow hips so symbolic of the man who never lets himself get out of condition.

His eyes were blue, and the focal point of many tiny wrinkles that one knew were gathered from long periods of facing wind and sun. They looked out frankly, from a face whose healthy tan was in perfect keeping with its ruggedness.

Deep crescents flanked his generous mouth. They marked the creases of a ready smile. His jaw was angular and might be called determined, stern, or even hard—depending upon the mood of its owner at the moment. Beneath the rakish brim of his soft felt hat a sprinkling of gray was woven into the black above the temples.

The door latch had not yet snapped shut behind this man before the dog leaped. A book fell to the floor, and the gray-haired man jumped from his chair with a cry of warning.

With open jaws displaying flashing fangs and a slaverless tongue, the dog swept through the archway into the entrance lobby. A deep rumble came from his throat. Then the wide jaws closed over the new arrival's hand.

The gray-haired man gasped. He didn't know that the grip of those vicious-looking jaws was so gentle it wouldn't have broken a baby's skin.

The dog shook the hand in his mouth. Shook it playfully, from side to side, and then let loose. He paid no attention to the gray-haired man. His reaction had been a natural one. The Eskimo dog had seen many men gasp when they first saw him greet his master that way.

"Well, well, Sole Survivor! Been a long day, eh? Glad to see me?"

The big man handed his gloves and overcoat to the waiting bell man, and twisted the pointed ears playfully.

"Has Sole Survivor been behaving himself, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Well, pretty good, Mr. Farwell. I took him out for a walk at noon, as usual." The bell man bowed his thanks and pocketed the half dollar. "Had a little excitement after we got back, but it didn't last long. The steward's cat got up out of the basement again, sir."

"So-o-o?" Farwell's eyebrows formed black arcs across his forehead. "Well, what was it this time, Jimmy?"

"One of the Satsuma vases by the library portières, sir."

Farwell reached down and gave another friendly tug at the pointed ears.

"I suppose that 'll be another couple of ciphers added to my monthly bill, eh?" he smiled. "We'd have been better off, old-timer, if you'd killed that damned cat the first time."

THE dog led the way over to the big chair. It was empty now, and he stood beside it. The light spots above his eyes dropped a little, and his ears flattened as the gray-haired man came up and recovered his book. Then, after the two men had shaken hands and another chair had been drawn up, he stretched his gray length at the feet of his master.

"I swallowed my heart, Farwell, when that dog leaped at you." The older man lit a long cigar.

His master laughed. "He does look vicious when he jumps, doesn't he? Kind of took my breath away the first time he pulled it on me, but I soon found that it was a trick of his. I've often wondered, professor, who taught it to him."

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"I heard you call him Sole Survivor. What's the significance?" The professor leaned back comfortably.

"He's all that ever got back from Johansen's last expedition."

The gray-haired man hurriedly drew back his legs as the dog's head snapped up.

"See!" continued Farwell. "He always shows interest whenever Johansen's name is mentioned."

"You mean Sven Johansen? Looking for land in the Polar Sea, wasn't he? Needed for an inter-continental airplane base or something like that, wasn't it?"

"Right," said Farwell. "American government financed him. Good man, too. Know him? No? Well, you missed something. Sven was the salt of the earth."

"You knew him well, didn't you?"

"Saved my life up in Baffin Land once. And I was right here in this club with him when he outfitted. I was supposed to go with him, but I took down with the flu and missed out. That was just three years ago, and eighteen months later this fellow here swam a two-mile shore lead and dropped exhausted at my feet."

"Shore lead?"

"The open water between the beach and the main ice pack."

"Where was that, Farwell?"

HOPEFULLY the brown eyes of the dog followed every movement as his master fished out a black pipe and loaded it. Then he dropped his nose back between his paws. He had rather expected a romp among the million strange smells of the water front this evening, but it looked as though the same old story was to be told again. With a sigh, he flattened out to a more comfortable position and prepared to wait. Might be a chance to get out after dinner. He cocked one ear to catch every soft-spoken word of his master.

"Well, after the expedition had been out almost a year their wireless went silent. We all figured that the ship had been crushed. Couldn't very well have figured anything else. They had two sets of sending apparatus. The last we had heard was from 76 North, 163 West. Johansen had frozen the White Seal in and planned on taking advantage of the drift, like Nansen did."

Farwell stopped to light his pipe. After a couple of puffs he continued.

"By that time I was over my flu, and was chosen to head an expedition with a two-fold purpose: to search for the members of the other party, and to try and locate that Arctic land that the government is so anxious to have. We know it's out there somewhere. Migratory birds go out in May and come back with fledglings in September."

"Well, if they know there's land there, I should think they could find it," was the professor's opinion.

Farwell let his lids drop half over his eyes as he leaned toward the gray-haired man.

"Were you ever on that pack off the north coast of Alaska, Benson? Have you ever been on an ice field? No? Well, I didn't think so."

He knocked the ashes from his pipe into the cuspidor.

"As I was saying, I headed the relief expedition, and had reached Franklin Point, southwest of Barrow. The ice was moving down into Bering Strait and there wasn't a chance to move. One day I was out on the beach, walking off some of my impatience at the delay, when I saw something swimming in the open water between the shore and the ice.

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"I thought at first it was a seal. Then I saw those pointed ears. Man! What a sight he was when he hit the sand!"

The big dog raised his head. His master always scratched his nose when he got to that point in the story.

"He was nothing but skin and bones. I wrapped my parka around him and held him on my lap till the chill left. He licked my face once, and then went to sleep like a baby. He was as near dead as anything I've even seen. Poor devil! I cut the tubular canvas collar off his neck. It had already been slit with a knife, but there were a few crumbs of pemmican in the bottom, where it had been sewed together."

"I don't get you, Farwell," said the professor. "You say there was pemmican in the collar?"

"Had been. Nothing but crumbs left. Sven was the one who taught me that trick, using every inch of space to the best advantage, doing away with all extra weight. If he killed a dog for food, he didn't throw away a curled hair or sawdust-stuffed collar—he ate everything. Sole Survivor had eaten off his harness, but he hadn't been able to get his teeth into— Yes, Jimmy?" Farwell broke off as the bell man came up deferentially.

"PARDON me, Mr. Farwell, have you missed anything from your room?"

"I haven't been up since I came in, Jimmy. Why?"

"Mr. Cathcart, the Biological Survey man, just reported a walrus tooth pipe and some Eskimo *labrets* stolen from his desk, and he has the room next to yours. Must be a prowler in the house."

"I'll take a good look when I go up, Jimmy. Thanks." He dismissed the bell man with a wave of his empty pipe.

"What burned me up," said Farwell, returning to his story, "was that the dog had been evidently working recently, and I couldn't get through the ice to make a search for the party he had been with."

"Perhaps he had been away from his master for a long time. You had no way of knowing positively that he had been with them a short time before, had you?"

The big dog rubbed the soft hand with a cold nose, as the professor timorously reached down to pat him.

"Sure I knew! He had toenails pulled off all four feet. Dogs don't lose toenails unless they are pulling heavy loads on glare ice." Farwell refilled his pipe.

"Two weeks later the ice cracked up under the influence of a new moon and a spring tide, and we got away."

Farwell's face muscles tightened. He made fists out of his hands. He gazed at the picture of his ship hanging on the lounge wall as though he was looking off into illimitable distance.

"We crushed at 74:30," he said, in a tight voice. "I got back with nine of my twelve men, three months after leaving the coast." He heaved a deep sigh. "As you know, professor, I'm getting another expedition together. I'll have just one purpose this time, exploration.

"There's no doubt about there being some land up there. Our government hasn't given up hope of finding it. There's great need of an airport at a very important point on a new air highway to Europe. You can imagine what possession of such a landing field would mean to this country in the future. I'm determined to locate it.

"I guess it's no use to look for Sven

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Johansen or any of his party; and yet I can't help feeling that he may be still alive. If any man could survive in the North, Sven could. We should have heard from him long before this, though. I guess that's just a peculiar idea of mine."

"Afraid so," assented the older man. "Another victory for the North, I would say. Some airmen lost, too, weren't there? Searching parties."

"Five men. Three planes. Well, the world should know by this time that the Polar wastes are not a picnic ground." He reached down and tugged gently at the dog's ears. "What a ghost this poor fellow was when he swam ashore that day! A ghost that held the secret of Johansen's fate. What a story he could tell, if he could only talk!"

The big dog ran his warm tongue over the back of his master's hand. That was the hand that had picked him up from the bleak beach, had patted him, and nursed him back to health. In one brutal, brain-bruising moment those terrible days passed before his eyes.

CHAPTER II.

AN ARCTIC TRAGEDY.

THE black swirl of the blizzard. The thunderous crashing of the ice. The buckling of the heavy wooden deck. He had been one of the first dogs that Sven had cut loose and thrown over the rail, to the closely packed ice.

Then came more dogs over the side. Sleds. Harness. Crates, boxes, bundles. The men cursed and bellowed as they worked like fiends getting supplies off the cracking ship. Sven's voice snapped through the screaming wind like the bark of a seal—sharp, brittle. Men sprang to obey his orders.

The thunderous moaning of the tortured ice almost drowned the cracking of the pressure-ridden ironbark sides of the White Seal. Eleven shadowy shapes toiled like demons, panting, with the condensed vapor of their breath swirling about their heads in wraith-like veils, they ran to the rails, heaved their burdens to the ice and then disappeared again into the depths of the stricken boat.

Crouched in the snow, with the shrieking wind driving pin-points of frost through his thick coat, the dog watched it all. Tip, the sluggard, lay beside him in a black, furry ball and whimpered. Some of the fifteen other dogs were whining, too. He reached over and nipped Tip, just to show his disgust.

Still the men toiled. Some of the things they were bringing out of the hold were now dripping with water. Four or five men were wrestling with a big steel drum. That would be the fuel for the primus stoves.

Then the crashing of the ice rose to a deafening, crunching grind. The White Seal's deck buckled up like the roof of a tent. The heavy drum rolled. It crashed through the rail. A piercing scream split the icy air. He saw a man, with mittens frozen to the steel barrel, pulled over. The drum fell to the ice. The man under it lay still.

Sven seemed to be everywhere at once. He was doing the work of two men. He, alone, was without his heavy fur parka, and his thick chest was heaving beneath the double row of pearl buttons on the front of his blue-flannel shirt. Festoons of frost clung to his heavy eyebrows, and beads of ice glittered in his blond mustache.

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He jumped to the ice with delicate instruments cradled in his arms, deposited them, and then ran back up the snow steps that had been built against the ship's side. Then, in another minute, he would be setting off four or five prisms of guncotton in an effort to relieve the pressure against the boat. Once he stopped long enough to yank a muttering man from his knees and plant his big fist in the fear-filled face.

"Do your praying after we get the stuff off!" he bellowed above the shouting of the wind.

The men had just started relaying the supplies back to safer storage when the final convulsion of the ice seemed to rock the world. The howl of the polar tempest was erased in the crashing, grinding crush of the frozen sea. Great slabs of green and white ice piled one upon the other.

Together with the other dogs, he ran back over the heaving pack. Men, too, ran—cursing, falling in the blackness as the ship's lights went out, and then getting up to scramble on; to get away from the terrifying cataclysm.

Then, suddenly, the rumbling of the ice ceased. The scream of the wind was the only noise to shatter the night, but it didn't whistle through the rigging of the ship any more. There was no ship. Where she had lain in the grip of the frozen sea a pressure ridge had been born. It stood fifty feet high, and was jagged, like a chain of mountains. Parts of it had fallen back, to cover some of the supplies.

HE slept that night on Sven's sleeping bag, while the men toiled. With the coming of daylight the wind died down. He saw that there were only six men, besides Sven. The last crush had come suddenly.

The men gathered into a knot around the primus stove on which their breakfast was cooking. Sven sat down on the sleeping bag beside him, and stroked his head as he outlined his plans to the remainder of the White Seal's crew.

That day was spent in getting things into shape for the long mush toward land. Grub was taken from the wooden cases and stowed in canvas bags. Syrup was poured out into the snow, and the empty cans filled with fuel from the big steel drum.

A hole was dug into the green ice, and the body of the man who had been crushed was placed in it. Sven made a cross of box boards and froze it upright at one end of the grave. His lips moved silently as he worked. Murphy, the cook, touched his forehead and both sides of his chest with the tip of his right mitt, and then everybody helped divide the load into two equal piles.

The next morning the two sleds were loaded, each outfit a unit complete in itself. He took his rightful place as leader before the other eight dogs on the first sled, and though the load was heavy, he managed to keep his nose close to the heels of Sven's *mukluks*.

He was soft, as were his teammates, from long idleness, and the sharp needles of ice rasped the balls of his feet. Sven rested them often, though, and gave them time to pull the balled snow out from between their toes with their teeth.

The first day they had fairly decent going, and then they came to the broken ice. Slabs ten feet thick and larger than the floor of the trading post at Point Barrow stood at all imaginable angles. Small, sharp points stuck up and caught the cross pieces under the sled. Sometimes the load

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would stop so suddenly that he would be thrown back on his haunches, and for hours afterward his shoulders would ache from the bruising. Then again, a bent would tear out with a splintering snap, and there would be a rest while the sled was repaired.

Day after day they fought the rough ice. At times the night camps were so close together that he could have easily trotted back to the previous one in half an hour. He lost all his excess weight, but his muscles hardened and his feet toughened up. The load was getting lighter, but this was more than offset by the decreased rations they received.

Tip, especially, was lying down on the job. He was working on the haw side of the first swing behind him, and twenty times a day Sole Survivor had to turn and show his teeth, or else take a sharp nip, in order to get him to work. Funston, the big red-head on the handle bars of the sled, swung his long whip with increasing frequency, but never once did the cruel lash bite into the lead dog's flanks. Even a blind man could have seen that he was doing his best.

ONE day they ran into a series of ragged, broken pressure ridges. It was a terrible, heart-breaking day, with the men pulling with them on ropes fastened to the sides of the sleds. Three times the loads were unlashed and the fuel, bedding, stoves, tent and grub passed from hand to hand over the cliffs of ice. That night when they camped, a rifle shot would have carried back to the scene of their morning's start.

The men were grumbling among themselves. Funston needlessly kicked him in the ribs while unhooking the team. Surly looks and harsh words passed back and forth as the tent was pitched. One of the men took Tip out behind an ice hummock.

He heard the sound of a shot echo across the frozen wastes, and from his place in the snow beside the sled he watched. When the man came back he threw each of the dogs a piece of red meat. The big dog's portion fell right before his nose, but he didn't eat that night, and he saw the frozen flesh loaded on the sled the next morning.

There were more of those terrible days ahead, and the grumbling among the men increased. The night after Tip had gone, Bako was taken. He heard Sven tell the man to use a knife and save ammunition. He again refused to eat, and Sven gave him some of the pemmican from Bako's collar. The following night Suggen, of the lame foot, was led behind the shoulder of an ice ridge.

And so it went. The sluggards, the weaklings, and the cripples were being taken first.

That was something that made the dog think, as he lay there in the snow. It might be a good idea to loaf a little during the morning hauls. Not much; just take it a little easier so that he would be the strongest at night.

He saw that the bags of grub, which were taken into the tent each night, were getting light. Perhaps that would account for the hollowness of the men's cheeks, but he knew that it was the fear of death that filled the eyes of some of them with that wild look.

Once, when the flap of the tent was thrown back, he saw Sven handing out the rations of pemmican. Tea and pemmican was all that the bags contained now. In his left hand Sven held a piece of string that had run through the eye in the center of a dog harness singletree. From each end of the foot-long stick an aluminium cup was sus-

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pended, and in one of them two rifle cartridges had been placed. Sven put enough pemmican in the other cup to make a balance, and then handed each man that amount for his meal.

Some of the men grumbled as they wolfed the meager portions. In disgust, Sven threw the stick in the snow. He sat down without serving himself.

"You're a bunch of rats, the lot of ye!" cried Murphy. "Here he does more work than any two of us, and he won't eat on account of your childish squawkin'. Here, Mr. Johansen, take part o' mine."

He held out a small dab of his pemmican, and as Sven slowly shook his head, he jerked it back. The man who had prayed on the deck had made a grab for it.

"Oh, no, ye don't, me hearty!" spluttered Murphy, crowding the pounded meat, fruit and grain into his mouth. "You've had your share, the same as the rest of us."

The man sneered. "Maybe if we took food off the sled during the day, like you three, we wouldn't be hungry either."

Biggers, the scientist, nodded an agreement with the accuser, and the third man of the second sled said:

"We know what's been going on."

CHAPTER III.

RAGE.

SVEN was on his feet like a flash. So was Funston. A deep bellow issued from Murphy's chewing jaws. In another second the night air was full of curses and the sound of hard fists pounding into muscled flesh. The tent came down, and they crawled out from under it fighting like two strange teams of malemutes.

It was a terrible thing, that fight out there in the middle of the frozen Arctic. Frenzied with hunger, fatigue and the haunting shadow of death, they fought like beasts. For a second, when his master was down, the dog had tugged at his chain, but it had been frozen fast to the ice with a cup of water when he had been unhitched.

He watched Sven regain his feet. He saw the wide shoulders working back and forth. Heard the curses of the men mix eerily with the excited howling of his teammates.

Overhead, the northern lights swept in streamers of brilliant colors. Green chased red to the very horizon, and then turned back to lose itself in a sweeping veil of orange at the zenith. Long tongues of ethereal flame shot vagrantly across the heavens, and then drew back into jumbled masses of tortured rainbow. The dogs howled. He even added his voice to the clamor once or twice. Then, all at once, the fight was over.

Sven was the only one on his feet. His breath was whistling through clenched teeth and forming a white fog around his shaggy head. His long, thick body weaved on heavy legs that were sprung at the knees. At his feet lay Biggers—his face a red blob. His two companions of the second sled lay near him, and Funston crawled through the snow on his hands and knees, shaking his red head like an angry walrus bull. Murphy was a crumpled, groaning heap on the fallen tent.

A CANDLE burned through till daylight in the tent that night, and the next morning they were on their way again. On, on! Always in the same direction, with the sun directly in front of his nose at noon.

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Then came the day when Lahkoo was taken behind a hummock by Funston, but when the red-head returned he carried all of his quivering burden into the tent. The smell of the cooking meat made hunger that much more keen. So keen that the dog who survived howled his protest.

Funston came out with the whip and lashed it about indiscriminately. One of the dogs jumped at him, and in the mêlée that followed the whip was left outside.

Later the dog managed to reach out and pull this whip to him. Six feet of the lash made a fairly satisfying meal. The next morning Funston gathered up the remains of the whip and prepared to give him a beating, but Sven stopped him. He laughed, and said something about "poetic justice." Then he said that this would be the last day for the two sleds. There were eight dogs left. To-morrow they would hook them all to one load.

Shortly after they started that day, they saw the "water sky" ahead. A dark streak was reflected in the mist that hung between heaven and ice. The dogs were driven hard. Open water might mean a seal, a walrus, or a narwhal.

They arrived at the water lead late, but the sun was staying up longer now. Sven took a rifle and scouted along the open lane that ran directly across their path. He returned later, empty-handed.

The lead was about as wide as the distance an Eskimo could shoot an arrow, and full of broken ice that whispered as a slow current kept it in motion. Only a few large cakes drifted by, and they were too far from the edge.

About noon the next day Murphy jumped to an ice pan, with a rope tied around his waist. It was anchored, but not large enough to support the whole party, so another was captured in the same manner.

The second cake was somewhat smaller, and Biggers insisted that his outfit would use the larger of the two. This was in spite of the fact that his sled was smaller, and the combined weight of himself and his companions much less than that of Sven, Funston, and Murphy.

His master simply shrugged his shoulders and led him out onto the smaller cake. Then he shoved it out into the lead. Biggers did the same with the other pan.

For hours they drifted along, unable in any way to control the course of their raft. A slight wind came out of the north, and gradually they neared the other edge of the lead. At last their improvised ferry bumped the solid ice, and he pulled the sled to safety. Just then he heard a c h o r u s of terrified shrieks. He snapped around in his harness.

A hundred feet out in the brash-filled streak of water the other ice cake bobbed in two pieces, neither one large enough to hold the sled and dogs. Slowly the two pieces drifted apart, and then one of them split. One man was plunged into the freezing brine. Another, kneeling with his hands clasped before his face, was unaware of the slow tilting of his insecure float. He, too, slipped below the surface.

The dog saw the sled drag the dogs under, and only Biggers remained. He clung desperately to the crumbling cake, and then the brash closed over his head and the shattered ice pan bobbed on in the tug of the current.

"God rest their souls," said Murphy reverently.

"The so-and-so's asked for it," said

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Funston, and the quiet air was filled with his obscene curses.

Sven tugged at one end of his mustache, but said nothing. Hard lines cut across the shiny frost scars that had burned deep into his cheeks the night the White Seal was crushed.

LESS than an hour later they hit some more bad ice. In and out among the hummocks, over sloping slabs that dropped off sheer at their upper ends, and across wind-packed drifts that were like ground glass, he led his three mates. Now Johnny, the wheel dog, was lagging.

It was tough going, and it was one of those late afternoons when the sun is obscured by a white mist of frost crystals in the air. One of those times when the light is white and hollow, and everything looks level because there is no shadow.

Murphy and Funston fell often, but it was because the ice looked smooth, not because of weakness, for Sven was continually stumbling, too. And then, just before they went into camp, Murphy cried out in pain where he had fallen. Sven placed him on the load, and that night he tore a length of top slat from the sled and put two pieces of it along the man's leg; binding it with strips torn from an empty pemmican sack.

For the next few days Murphy rode on the sled, and the extra load was telling against the big dog's shoulder. Especially since Johnny had fallen under Funston's knife. The men were less thoughtful now. They didn't even hunt for an ice hummock, but did their butchering right before his eyes, and the other two dogs'.

One night he looked through the open flap of the tent while Sven worked over the groaning Murphy. The man's leg was black to the hip, and almost as large around as his body. He begged Sven and Funston to go on and leave him, but Sven only laughed and tried to cheer him up. Murphy begged for a gun, and after he went to sleep Sven took the guns and knives into his own sleeping bag with him.

Later that night the dog was awakened by some one coming out through the tent flap. He uncurled his tail from around his nose and watched. It was Murphy, crawling along on his belly. Two sled-lengths from the tent he stopped and looked back. He mumbled something under his breath about being a handicap, and then he turned and dragged himself off toward the pale moon on the eastern horizon.

EARLY in the morning, Sven and Funston took him with them on the end of his chain. They needn't have. The mark in the snow was as plain as if some one had dragged a seal by a hind flipper. And at the end of the new-made trail lay Murphy, flat on his face with his arms outflung; forming a perfect cross in the snow. Without a word the two men started covering the brittle form of their comrade with chunks of ice broken from a near-by pressure ridge, and when the work was finished he saw his master's lips moving silently again, as they had back there at the scene of the wreck when he had put on the dead man's parka and then placed him in the hole in the green ice.

Funston, the hard, silent red-head, chewed on his lower lip, and a silent day was spent forging on across the ice desert. On through the dead world they toiled, with not even the sign of an old bear track to hearten them. And late that night they came upon land.

It was a corpse of an island, that

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rocky scar on the polar sea. It rose like a gray bruise on the white ice field; its flat top less than fifty feet above the pack. A loose dog could have run around it in half a day, yet to Sven it must have looked like a new continent. He shouted and threw his fur cap into the air.

"Funston!" he cried. "I have proved that I was right. Some day there will be an airplane field and a dirigible station on this island. Think of it, man! Think of it! We have discovered probably the last land ever to be found on this old globe. Think of it!"

"And the secret of its location dies with us, Johansen. We can't make the mainland on two ounces of food a day. The jig's up."

Funston spoke the last three words with a finality that invited no argument, and he saw Sven shrug his shoulders, as he turned to unhook the dogs.

A few minutes later Minnie lay quivering on the snow, while Funston caught the warm blood gushing from her throat in a cup, which he dumped three times into the big aluminium pot.

CHAPTER IV.

ALONE.

FOR two days they stayed at the island, while Sven waited to look at the sun through the instrument that he had guarded so carefully. At last the mist drifted away and he watched his master make many figures on a piece of paper.

While Sven was doing all this, Funston was sitting on a point of rock, looking off into space. Sven probably hadn't seen it, but there were strange lines on Funston's face. They were lines of torture that were etched by the twistings of a mind gone wrong. Funston was breaking.

Funston was not the first man to break, that voyage. There had been the Eskimo who had gone *piblokto* at Flaxman Island, and had tried to kill the trader there. Then there had been the sailor off an icebound whale ship who had stripped himself naked and raced out across the pack.

Funston didn't crack, though, till Sven had put the lead dog and Jerry into harness and made ready to continue on across the white wastes. Then Funston broke, suddenly, like a match between angry fingers. He clung to a jagged point of rock, and resisted all efforts of Sven to pull him to his feet.

"I'm going to stay here!" he shrieked. "It's land! My land! I won't have to fight the ice any more." He scrambled to his feet, and pushed Sven away from him. He swung an arm around the monotonous horizon. "Ice! Ice! There's nothing but ice and this farm of mine in the world! I am going to stay!"

He stuck his two thick arms up into the air, threw back his big head, and laughed.

It was a hideous sound, that laugh. It came in hysterical gusts from his drooling lips. It was blood-curdling in its timbre, and inhuman in its mirthlessness. It stopped suddenly on the peak of an uncanny screech. Funston looked at Sven with eyes that blazed with a weird light coming from far deep in shadowed sockets. He wiped a long, shiny slaver from his chin with a hand like an eagle's claw.

Funston had broken. Funston, the bull of the expedition! Funston, the man who in trials of strength always gained a laughing victory over the other members of the crew. Funston the willing. The never complaining.

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The hard. The silent. The man who always took things as they came. That man had broken!

He fell at Sven's feet, driveling. He mouthed strange words, and mumbled feebly of orchards and alfalfa fields. He mentioned names that belong only to horses, and he cried. Cried hard, like a child. Deep down inside of him. His brute brain had been unequal to the strain of facing death day after day.

Lying there in his harness, with Jerry whimpering at his flank, the lead dog looked at his master standing over the wreck that had been Funston, and wondered if Sven, too, was going to break. The colorless lips were twitching dangerously, and the frost scars stood out brown against the marble whiteness of his face.

But he was to learn more about Sven in the days that followed.

HIS master did not sleep that night, nor the next. The sled had been unloaded and the camp repitched. Strange sounds came from inside the tent, while he and Jerry lay in the lee of a big gray bowlder.

Then Sven came out and tore down the cairn that had been erected at the highest point on the island. He rebuilt it, over the still form of Funston. The next day he cut four feet from the front of the sled. It took three hours of continuous bending back and forth to break the saw-steel runners off at the place where he had cut through the wood.

With the small sled, they started out over the ice desert again. Four days later they camped beside old tracks of a polar bear. Sven went off with his rifle, but returned empty-handed after a couple of hours.

In the morning poor Jerry, a whining bundle of skin and bones, couldn't stand on his feet, and there was a short delay. When he and Sven started out again, Jerry's carcass was on top of the load.

It was almost a week after this that they hit some bad going, and he was so weak that he could hardly keep the sled moving on good trail, let alone drag it up through the glassy, snow-blasted slabs that tore the nails from his feet.

Jerry had been nothing but a memory for four days, when Sven had ripped open his collar one night as he had lain with his head on his master's lap. And then the last of that pemmican had gone. He was grateful for the small portion Sven had given him.

They were two days getting through the jumble of broken ice, and the night they camped, with a level expanse once more before them, Sven cut him a piece from his skin parka. The dog chewed the hide, while his master singed the hair from another piece and boiled it in the pot.

On into the south they continued, and when the parka was gone Sven cut the tops from his *mukluks*. After that there were three days with nothing to eat. Another water sky showed up ahead of them, and they tried to hurry. But Sven kept f a l l i n g to his knees. Once he fell his full length and lay still. The dog licked his master's face and prodded him with a cold nose. With an effort Sven raised himself and staggered on.

When they reached the open water he could barely drag the sled. His flanks were quivering from exhaustion and his feet were leaving crimson dots to mark the trail. He dropped to the ice a few feet from where Sven lay. How long he lay there he did not know, but the next thing he remembered was Sven unslipping the toggle that fas-

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tened him to the short length of walrus hide towline.

His master didn't even take off his harness, but pulled his head over onto his lap. He petted the dog and talked to him a long time. Then Sven drew out his big knife, and the dog felt the point of it against his throat, under the collar.

"A fine reward for faithful service, eh, old pal?"

Sven's voice was a choked whisper. There was a moment of silence, and then, with a full-lunged curse of refusal, the knife was drawn away and thrown to the ice.

He reached up and grabbed Sven's hand in his mouth and shook it—a trick he had learned during those long months on the ship. The action put strength into his master, and soon the sleeping bag was s p r e a d and Sven slept.

His harness had been left on, but he didn't mind that. He curled up at Sven's feet, and the lapping of water against the edge of the ice was like the song of the beach at home.

During the night a breeze came up. It awakened him, and as he lifted his nose he caught a faint scent of fox.

INSTANTLY he jumped to his feet. He knew that there was nothing on the Arctic ice that a fox could kill. The scent of them could mean only one thing: polar bear. They would be following the s h a g g y white fellow, waiting to pick up what he might leave of a seal after his appetite had been appeased.

He struck off with his nose into the wind, and soon he came upon their tracks. As he had surmised, the foxes were following the trail of a bear. He trotted along after them on legs that wabbled weakly. Then he saw them, just as dawn was breaking. A half dozen of t h e m were fighting over something black that they had pulled and hauled near the edge of the lead.

He bared his teeth and charged them, and like white ghosts of animals they slunk away, with occasional angry barks. At a distance they stood and watched him as he gorged himself on the sweet blubber and juicy meat of the seal that some meandering bear had killed. Over half of the sleek animal had been eaten, but there was still a considerable portion.

He lay down beside it, holding it with his paws and tearing at it with the delicious scent of blood in his nostrils. Every once in a while he looked around to be sure there was no danger—the smell of the bear was still strong.

Then he was sick from crowding his starved stomach and he wished he might have some grass to chew, but there wasn't any grass, and he paid for his gluttony with spasms of pain that seemed to tear his body to pieces.

Then, when the family of foxes had gone off in search of another bear trail, he t r o t t e d back to where Sven was camped.

He followed the edge of the lead, which was miles wide, and even before he realized that the breeze which had brought him the scent of the fox had also broken up the edge of the ice, he saw the tiny dark spot that was Sven bobbing on a pan far out in the open water. He stretched out and rested his muzzle on his paws, never taking his eyes off the dark spot.

Wind and current carried it farther and farther away. It became smaller and smaller. It passed completely out of sight long before he returned to the remains of the s e a l. And there he stayed for four days, filling his body

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with new strength. Strength, though, that ran out swiftly through his legs when he started out along the lead with the intention of getting around it and continuing in the direction he and Sven had been traveling.

At last he came to where it was narrow, and a wedged floe offered him a bridge to the other side. By that time he had eaten his leather traces, and gnawing hunger was again his constant companion.

On, on, he held his course, till one morning he stood on the edge of the ice and looked across to the long, low line of the land against the sky.

The chilling water cramped every one of the few stringy muscles that still clung to his bony frame. It numbed his heart till every beat was a painful protest. It burned his sore feet like hot seal oil.

He drove himself through the last hundred feet of that icy brine by the sheer will to live, and there was the dim figure of a man on the beach to give him courage.

CHAPTER V.

THE PROWLER.

A BELL jangled in the office of the club lounge and broke his reverie. He rose on his front legs and nosed the knee of the man with the pipe.

"You are right, Farwell," the other man was saying. "If he could talk, he'd certainly have a story to tell."

A uniformed man who had just run down the stairs was hurrying back toward them.

"What is it, Jimmy?" Farwell asked.

"It was a prowler, all right. He's somewhere on your floor."

The bell man started up the steps, and Farwell jumped to his feet.

"Come on, Sole Survivor. You might come in handy in a case like this."

The two men and the dog hit the third floor landing together.

Against a frosted fire escape window at the very end of the hall was the outline of a man sitting on a bench. He was turning something over in his hands, slowly, thoughtfully.

As the dog lunged down the corridor with serrated lips drawn back from flashing fangs and a deep rumble in his throat, the man half rose from his seat and turned to face them.

Snow-white hair streamed out from beneath a seaman's winter cap, and above a silver beard two wide blue eyes looked out with the vacancy of empty windows. He was tall, gaunt and bony, and his short blue pea jacket hung loosely on his spare frame. He opened his mouth, as though to cry out, but only a hollow gurgling sound came through the thick beard as the dog grabbed his hand. He crumpled to the carpet, and in one clenched, outflung hand was the stem of a walrus tooth pipe.

Farwell reached him first. "Open the door to my room," he ordered, gathering the man into his arms. "Get Doc Burns," he supplemented as Jimmy sprang to obey. He carried the man in and placed him gently on the bed.

Within a couple of minutes the doctor, clad in a bathrobe and with one side of his face covered with lather, came in with a little black bag. He unloosed the patient's clothing and made a hasty examination. He called for a glass of water, dropped something in it out of a bottle from the black bag, and forced it down the man's throat.

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The doctor shook the man's head slowly, and then rolled the eyelids back on an applicator stick. He reached into the bag and brought out a head band to which was attached a small electric g l o b e set in a reflector. He snapped this around his forehead, jammed the connection plug into a handy socket, and trained the light into the man's eyes.

Farwell stood at the foot of the bed filling his pipe while the doctor, looking like a sleep-walking miner, studied his patient. At last the medical man straightened up, snapped the band off his head, and wiped the drying lather from his face on the bedspread.

"THIS poor fellow has been out of his mind," he said, pulling a cigarette from his bath robe pocket. "Not insane, understand, but—Well, we call it sensory amnesia. You know. No ideas of time, place or meaning."

"You mean—he doesn't know who or where he is?" ventured Farwell, rubbing the bowl of his pipe against his nose.

"That's the idea," nodded the doctor, studying the face of the man on the bed. "Jimmy, here, said he was a prowler, but I've got ten bucks that says this old boy is no thief. Look at those hands. Thieves don't have chapped hands covered with callouses."

"Those brown splotches on his cheek bones look like frost to me," said Farwell. "Wonder who he is?"

The doctor started through the man's clothes with the expertness of a police sergeant searching a prisoner. The door clicked shut as Jimmy started back to his duties.

The inside of the man's coat pocket gave up a folded sheet of paper. The doctor held it to the light.

"Well," he said, "his name's Lars Larson, and he's got over a year's wages coming from the Arctic Commercial Company. This is an order on them for the money. Who'n hell are they, anyway? You ought to know."

Farwell was looking at the white-bearded face.

"I was certain those were frost scars," he said, half to himself. And then to the doctor: "The Arctic Commercial? Why, they're sealers and whalers. Do some trading with the natives, too." Then his fingers snapped. "By George, Doc, they had a ship in this afternoon! I'll bet he was one of the crew."

A low moan came from the pillow, and the gaunt figure on the bed stirred, restlessly.

"Look! He's coming around."

The doctor snapped into action, digging into his bag.

"You may have a chance of seeing a man reborn in a minute, Farwell. This fellow has had some kind of a shock, and that often restores an amnesia victim to his real self. Wonder what the shock was?" He dissolved a tablet in some water.

"The dog."

"The dog? What do you mean?"

"The dog jumped at him, and he crumpled like a punctured balloon," said Farwell.

The man on the bed rubbed his hands over his face, and when he took them away his eyes were open. They darted around the room. A scowl etched deep lines in his forehead.

"Bring that dog in here," ordered the doctor. He was the professional man now, and every word and action had snap and assurance about it.

Farwell opened the door, and spoke to the dog stretched on the corridor carpet beside it. The big Eskimo dog

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stepped into the room with his head high. He lunged across the intervening space and closed his jaws gently over a hand that lay limply on the edge of the bed.

The man turned, and the long white hair fell away from the side of his head.

Farwell suddenly leaned far over the foot of the bed. His knuckles were white where his hands gripped the rail, and the blood drained slowly from his face. His pipe trembled between his strong teeth. The doctor saw the action and asked:

"What is it?"

"By George! That ear — the left one." Farwell's voice was tense. "The top of it's gone. Doc! That's Sven! That's Johansen! He lost that while I was with him."

AT the mention of the names, the man on the bed raised up. With one hand he patted the dog's head. He rubbed the other over baffled eyes. Farwell ran around and sat on the edge of the bed, and when the man dropped his hand he was looking straight into his eyes.

"Ace!" he cried. "Ace Farwell!" He threw his arms around the large man's neck. His gaunt frame trembled as though with the palsy. "What— what— Oh, my God! Is this a dream?"

His voice was barely audible. The doctor blew his nose violently while the two men embraced each other.

"Where am I? How did I get here?" Johansen asked.

"You're in the Arctic Club in Seattle, Sven. Next door to your old room." Farwell's pipe stem rattled against his teeth.

"But how did I get here?"

Farwell grabbed the piece of paper from the table beside the bed.

"Do you know you've been going under the name of Lars Larson? Does this paper mean anything to you?"

Johansen caught his lower lip between his teeth. He shook his head.

"Not a thing," he said.

"Here," chipped in the doctor. "Let me ask him a few questions, Farwell."

He sat down on the other side of the bed and took one of the big calloused hands in both of his.

"Now stop and think, Johansen," he said, softly. "What is the last thing that you can remember?"

There was a moment of tense silence, while Sven's brows knitted. "Floating on an ice pan, and eating a piece of walrus hide towline that I cut from the sled," he offered in a whisper.

"Is that the very last thing?"

Again the knitted brows. And again the whispered answer.

"No. I have a hazy recollection of some men coming in an *umiak*."

"What's an *umiak?*" The doctor turned to Farwell.

"An Eskimo skin boat. Sometimes used by the whalers."

"That's what happened, then. They picked him up, took him to their ship and gave him a name. After his harrowing experiences the sight of the men in the boat threw a kink into his brain. Everything from that moment up to now is a blank to him. The dog jumping at him took the kink out."

"I'd never have recognized him except for that ear," said Farwell. "That snow-white hair and beard are too old looking for your middle-aged face, Sven," he grinned. "But how in the world did you happen to get up here to the club?"

"I don't know," smiled Johansen.

The doctor offered his explanation. "Quite common," he said. "Happens often in cases of this kind. Prompted

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by unconscious familiarity with some place or object. Without volition, his feet led him up here, probably as soon as they hit the water front with which he was acquainted." The doctor smashed out his cigarette in a tray.

"I suppose that's the reason he walked into the room he used to have and took those Eskimo souvenirs," ventured Farwell.

"That's it, exactly. Unconscious familiarity again. His mind has been groping, seeking to recall the past." The doctor rose from the bed. "Well, nothing else I can do right now. Fill him up with good food, Farwell, and keep him warm. His nerves will be under considerable tension for a few days until he gets himself adjusted." He shook Johansen's hand, offered him some bantering advice, and left with his little black bag.

FARWELL placed his hand over one of his pal's. "By George, Sven! It's great to see you come back from the grave like this. You don't know it, of course, but I'm just ready to start on another expedition up there. Got the government back of me. They're bound to find that land."

A wan smile wrinkled the brown scars on Sven's cheeks.

"I found the land," he said, simply.

"You found it? Oh, but I'm glad! Glad you get the honor you so well deserve." He reached up and shook the wide shoulders.

'Yes, I remember," replied Johansen. "The notes were lost, but I remember well. When I woke up I was drifting on an ice pan. The dog was gone, but the sled was with me. Later the floe broke up and the sled went under, and my notes with it, but I remember—it's at 72:10 North, 163:40 West." His eyes were focused into the distances beyond the room.

"I can imagine, Sven. Tell me later. Right now you have to rest."

He got up and pulled the shade down on the window. He paced the length of the room two or three times.

"You just lie back and rest, Sven. I'm going down and give the news to the world, but I won't let the newspaper men bother you till you give the word. I'll bring back a great big steak with all the trimmings. We'll have dinner alone, here in the room." He knocked the noggin from his pipe and stepped over to the door. He snapped his fingers.

"Come on, Sole Survivor," he said. "It's about time for you to take on some fuel, too."

The big Eskimo dog was sitting on his haunches midway between the two men. At Farwell's words his plume-like tail stopped wagging for a moment. He looked from one to the other with his soft, intelligent eyes. Then, very slowly, he walked over to the bed and rested his chin over the edge, close beside the white head on the pillow.

For a long minute Farwell stood perfectly still. Then he stepped over and grasped one of his pal's toil-twisted hands.

"I'm sorry, Sven. I—I forgot. He isn't mine any more."

"You called him Sole Survivor—"

"But, Sven, we all thought—"

"I know, but he's got a real name. I called him Ace, after you."

The big gray dog pricked up his ears. He put his front paws on the edge of the bed and nudged the clasped hands with his cold nose. A reverent, church-like silence filled the room. Outside, a wintry wind whistled around the corners of the Arctic Club.

THE END.

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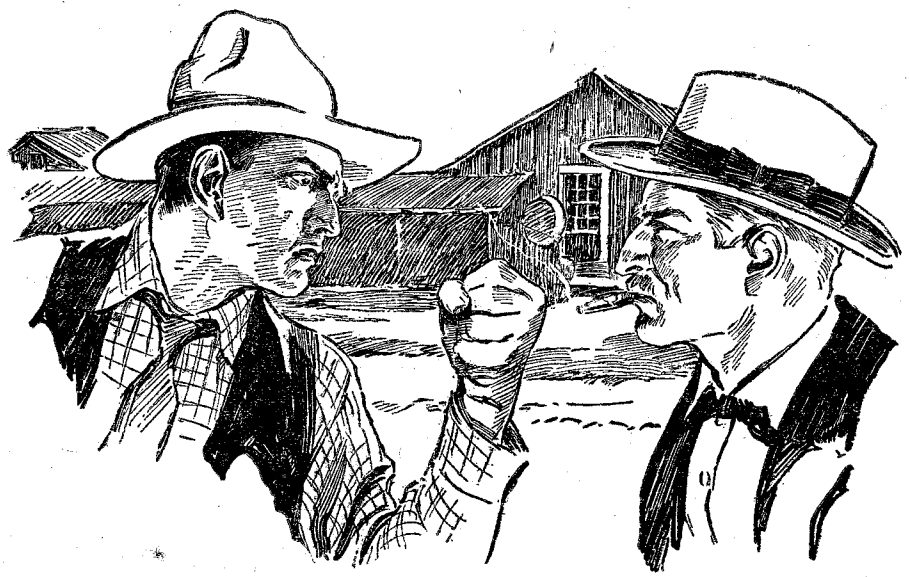

Jemcy shook his fist under his squint-eyed neighbor's nose

Hay Wired

Jemcy Wade was fighting to save his ranch from a crooked neighbor when his dog dug up a fortune—and a problem

By JOHN BRIGGS

IF ever a man needed ten thousand dollars in cash, it was Jemcy Wade. And if ever a man was tempted to slip said ten thousand in his pocket and thereafter become tonguetied, it was also that same Jemcy Wade. Concealed by a thicket of tobacco brush into which he had furtively stepped, Jemcy was holding the ten amazing yellowbacks in his trembling hands, counting them and examining them incredulously.

When a man stares at such impressive figures on a piece of Uncle Sam's paper, it usually does something to the moral precepts he has learned at his mother's knee—especially if he be a struggling homesteader with a sick wife and debts which the court has ordered him to pay. It was a cruel hunk of irony to have picked up this staggering wealth and yet have to round up grub on crippled credit.

Unfortunately for his peace of mind he knew who had lost the roll. The money belonged to his wealthy neighbor and enemy, Ira Yocum. The mockery of it was only heightened by the fact that his neighbor had been employing underhanded tactics to ruin him. During the preceding night Ira Yocum's cattle had broken in and had trampled down at least a hundred dollars worth of Jemcy's standing barley. Said barley crop represented Jemcy's only prospect for making the financial grade. He could not collect damages, because his rickety barbed wire fence

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fell short of the specifications prescribed by the State as stock-proof.

Yocum had deliberately taken advantage of the opening. All during the spring months he had overstocked the adjoining pasture land. Then, at the beginning of the dry season, he had turned a bunch of old range cows into the barren field. Naturally the hungry bovines had broken through the dividing fence to crush and devour Jemcy's fine stand of barley.

A natural but oddly combined sequence of circumstances had registered a come-back for the out-and-injured homesteader, and had placed ten thousand dollars in his hands. Aside from the fact that Ira Yocum was known to be penurious and greedy, he had a miserly habit of holing his money instead of banking it.

TIRED of watching his master repair the broken fence, "Mac" had started off on an excursion. He had chased a squirrel part way up a low timbered ridge, on the opposite side of which stood Yocum's ranch buildings. After a futile effort to dig the squirrel out of its hole, he had nosed on, scouting for more game.

Eventually he had returned, carrying the small, odd-shaped packet. He had dropped the object at his master's feet, and he had barked, signifying his desire to have it tossed for him to catch. Now the pup was cocking an inquiring ear at his boss, disappointed at being cheated out of the game.

Except for his agitated state of mind, Jemcy might have been amused at the way the currency was wrapped. The outer covering was a strip of asbestos cloth, evidently calculated to prevent destruction by fire. Within it the bills were folded in oiled parchment to exclude water.

With a fistful of sudden wealth, Jemcy sparred with temptation. It was easy to iron out his moral corrugations by considering the numerous injuries his neighbor had caused him.

Jemcy's conscience delivered the old slow one about honesty being the best policy. He slugged back with the conviction that his neighbor would skillfully side-step such scruples if the circumstances were just reversed. In fact, the grasping rancher was already coveting his small homestead, now that the creek-bottom land had been made valuable by the Big Basin irrigation canal which touched the east border of it.

Previously Jemcy had punched cattle for Ira Yocum. At that time he had possessed the average waddy's contempt for nesters. But he had met a certain admirable young woman and had contracted the calico viewpoint. Thus enlightened, he had seen opportunity in three hundred and twenty acres of free land adjoining his employer's ranch. He had supposed that he might help out living expenses by continuing to work for old Ira at odd times. That supposition had suffered a setback as soon as he had become a neighbor instead of an employee.

"No use, Mac," Jemcy muttered, looking down at the Airedale, "I could not get away with it, anyhow. Ira will make such a howl that I'd sure as blazes get caught up, if I tried to change any o' these bills around here. Only—"

Jemcy hesitated on the idea that occurred to him. Why not keep the money until he should leave the country entirely, as he would probably be forced to do soon enough? His thoughtful frown deepened as he thought of his wife.

Sooner or later he would have to tell her. And he knew that Macy wouldn't want him to win by a foul. On the

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other hand, Ira Yocum deserved the loss.

Wade's resentment blazed when he thought of returning the roll to its owner. He knew that instead of thanking him, his irascible neighbor would tell him to keep his ugly mutt tied up.

The old proverb about heaping coals of kindness on your enemy's head wouldn't apply to an asbestos skull. Out of the young homesteader's trial and tribulation was born a plan of compromise. He remembered that he had seen Yocum d r i v i n g toward town that morning. The coast was clear, except for ranch hands.

Carefully he rewrapped the yellowbacks, taking pains to make the folds follow the former creases. By rubbing the soft asbestos outer lining he managed to erase Mac's teeth marks so that they were hardly noticeable. Temptation still lingered in the back of his mind, otherwise he might not have considered attempting to restore the money without the owner being any the wiser.

The idea left him a pleasant loophole for his guilty impulse to keep the fortune that had fallen into his hands. He was really leaving the question open for a later decision. If he could replace the roll without leaving any evidence that it had been disturbed, he would have the satisfaction of holding an ace which his opponent would not suspect.

He failed to consider the possibility that an act of recovery might be more like a case of theft.

STEPPING from the thicket, he glanced about with an odd sense of guilt. His own new little ranch house stood about a quarter of a mile distant on the benchland rising abruptly above the alluvial bottom bordering the ancient stream bed. A thin streamer of smoke spiraling from the kitchen chimney reminded him that the time was approaching noon.

The hour was favorable for his furtive undertaking. Presently, Yocum's ranch hands would all be storming the cook house. Moreover, Jemcy was reasonably sure that old Ira's outdoor bank was not within sight of his buildings. Presumably the cautious rancher always avoided visiting his cache unless he had some ostensible excuse for being in its neighborhood. Somewhere on the timbered ridge was a likely location.

Coaxing the dog to follow him, Jemcy climbed up the sloping embankment from the creek bed. As soon as he had climbed the ridge to the protection of the scrub oaks, he began to look for signs of Mac's recent digging.

Working along the top of the hogback, he encouraged the pup to nose about among the bowlders and trees. Mac was easily induced to enter into the spirit of the game. Eventually it occurred to him to revisit the place of his recent excavations. He darted suddenly through a grove of low branching oaks which occupied a bench of the slope.

Avoiding the trees, under which cattle had tramped the ground into powdery dust, Jemcy reached the lower edge of the shelf. Looking down, he saw Mac investigating a ledge of bowlders at the base of the drop. After climbing down the steep embankment, he discovered plentiful evidence of the Airedale's previous industry.

It was apparent that a squirrel had dug a new home just beneath the ledge, probably having tunneled through the lower soil in order to excavate a cavity higher up behind the protecting stone. Mac was excitedly nosing the hole, occasionally glancing up to cock his ears in a listening attitude.

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Encouraged by his master's presence, he scrambled halfway up the ledge. Planting his forepaws on a wedge-shaped bowlder which had evidently been tilted from its former position, he stuck his nose into a small crevice and sniffed loudly.

There was evidence that the small cavity had been drilled out by hand. Wade thrust the oblong packet of currency into the niche and discovered that it would fit only by being placed on edge. Noticing traces of sandy soil in the small hollow, he concluded that the package had been covered with earth as an extra precaution.

He tried to restore everything to its former order. The facing stone wedged itself snugly into its natural position, leaving scarcely a noticeable crack about the edges. Before leaving, Jemcy went over the ground carefully, brushing out all traces where the soil had been disturbed.

YET the fact that he had restored that roll of money failed to afford him much righteous satisfaction as he hurried back. He resolved that he would not tell Macy anything about the occurrence. Entering his house, he tried to assume a cheerful attitude. His girl wife regarded him with worried, questioning eyes. Jemcy knew that she needed rest and care, and he was depending upon selling his hay crop as a means of providing it.

"There wasn't much damage done," he declared in answer to her wordless question. "Anyhow, I'll start cuttin' right away on that side o' the field, so's them hungry cow brutes won't tramp down very much, if they get in again."

"What did Ira Yocum says?" his vexed helpmate inquired. "Your dinner's been waiting an hour!"

Jemcy started to stammer an excuse, then he realized that Macy had seen him returning from the neighboring ranch. She had him cornered, and he told the truth. As his wife listened to his somewhat incoherent account, her eyes widened.

"Why didn't you wait and take it back to him?" she demanded finally. "It might have made him ashamed of the way he's acted, Jem."

Jemcy forced a laugh. "Nope, you don't know old Ira, honey," he retorted. "He'd 'a' figured me out as a boob, that's all!"

"Well, I'm glad you did put it back!" the little woman declared, with a glow of pride in her tired eyes. "The old skinflint can have his filthy money!"

Hearing and seeing which, Jemcy resolved that he would never sneak back after the roll which he had so briefly possessed. He was still young enough to feel mighty well pleased at having the little girl look at him like that. But he didn't realize how tough it was going to be to keep his resolve.

Working alone from daylight till dark, Jemcy cut and shocked his thirty acres of hay. After a week's labor, he surveyed the thickly standing shocks which dotted the level field and calculated that the rich alluvial soil had produced at least three tons to the acre. He could expect to get twenty dollars a ton for the crop, after having it baled.

He would have to haul it twenty-five miles to market, but that was only an ordinary item. Ninety, minus ten tons for his own use, would leave him eighty tons to sell—which should bring him sixteen hundred dollars. After deducting a hundred and thirty-five dollars for the baling, he would still net more than fourteen hundred dollars—not a small sum for a debt-ridden homesteader struggling to get a foothold.

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Enough to get by, and some to spare, in spite of Ira Yocum.

That night, he and the little wife talked over their prospects cheerfully. Happily they retired for the first untroubled sleep in many a night. With the daylight Jemcy rose and hurried out to feed his horses. Returning to the house, he looked down over his hay field and the blood drained from his face. Overnight, it had become a lake!

A MOTIONLESS, sullen lake, surfaced with a bright scum of hay, above which projected many of the rounded shocks that were still intact. Stunned and weak-kneed, Jemcy surveyed the scene of disaster. He guessed at the cause of the flood, and something told him that it had not been accidental.

His neighbor's alfalfa field, which adjoined the hay land, was also partly under water, but suffering no damage. The day before, several of Yocum's ranch hands had been irrigating the alfalfa. It appeared that they had carelessly left open the flume gate in the main canal. Yet even such a piece of carelessness did not account for the water now covering Wade's hay field.

He noticed that the mounting water level had almost reached the top of the surrounding flood dikes. At almost any moment, the dikes would break, letting the water and hay into the old creek bed to be washed away. Jemcy had constructed the dikes, not to keep in a body of water as they were doing now, but to keep out a chance overflow from the creek in case of a cloudburst.

No small irrigation stream could have flooded the thirty-acre field overnight. The entire contents of the main canal were flowing in. The ruined homesteader felt a sudden lack of interest in the matter.

It looked as though the water had stopped rising. Yet it would require several days for it to sink into the earth. By that time, his hay would be completely spoiled. He felt dazed. He hardly noticed that the sun had risen and was showering its golden light upon his blasted hopes. It was pretty hard to start making new plans for the future. With lowered head, he entered the house and commenced building a fire in the kitchen stove.

After all, it made it a heap easier to face calamity with a side-kick like Macy. After she got through cheering him up, he was ready to snap his fingers in the devil's face. And the devil's leering visage resolved itself into a likeness of Ira Yocum. He did more than to snap his fingers; he shook his fist under his squint-eyed neighbor's nose and threatened to bring a damage suit.

The wily rancher laughed at him and stubbornly maintained that his men had not left the flume gate open. Sneeringly he declared that there had been an accidental break in the main canal. Moreover, his ranch hands would support his testimony in court.

Once more Jemcy's thoughts recurred to that ten thousand dollars which he had safely returned to its hiding place. Yet he sold his live stock, with the exception of his work team and two saddle horses. He needed them to transport his worldly possessions to whatever future destination he and Macy might choose to call their humble home.

Under the hot sun, the spoiled hay was drying out. He tried to feed some of it to his horses, but the barley heads had turned to rank mold, and the rest of it was blackened straw. However, the wetting had caused much of the stubble to grow again, and it provided

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grazing. As to the rotten hay, Jemcy reflected that he might provide himself with a great deal of pleasure, if he could make Ira Yocum eat it.

He just downright wished that Mac would dig out that money again! The wish fathered the suggestion that he might give the pup a little encouragement. In which case, only the dog's tracks would be left to tell the tale, and they could not be followed far.

He couldn't help toying with the idea, and it finally gave birth to inspiration. The scheme which flashed into his mind was a knock-out. He chuckled over it, then his grin vanished as he wondered how Macy would take to the notion. He would have to tell her, in order to put it through.

Macy proved to be a good sport, after all. She fell in with the plan. She could see nothing wrong with it. Again her shadowed eyes bestowed on him a look of adoration. Jemcy felt like a genius. That night under a bright moon, he returned to Yocum's cache, Mac following eagerly at his heels. His willing four-footed accomplice didn't require coaxing in the performance of retrieving the packet of currency.

THE following day, Jemcy drove to the nearest hay press outfit and engaged to have his spoiled hay baled. When the press crew finally arrived, it was with astonishment that they saw what was expected of them.

In their somewhat openly expressed opinions, their employer was just another homesteader gone loco. Nevertheless they set to work, considering that he had the money to pay them. Jemcy had a hundred and sixty dollars left from the sale of his live stock.

Ira Yocum, driving by along the county road, paused to view the scene of industry with doubtful astonishment. However he may have laughed to himself, it was only a week afterward that he called upon his neighbor in a very excited and deplorable state of mind.

It was a hot day, and it took him considerable time to state the cause of his mental agitation. At length he falteringly confessed his peculiarities with respect to caching money.

Stammering and shaken with apprehension, he finally blurted out the fact that somebody's dog had dug up his roll. Judging by the tracks, he suspected that Jemcy's Airedale had been the culprit.

Jemcy pondered this information while his eyes rounded with a good imitation of surprise. "What sort of a lookin' package was your money wrapped in, Ira?" he inquired at last.

"It was white lookin'," declared the perspiring rancher. "About the size and shape of a pound o' bacon. It was asbestos covered, outside."

"Might look like a wad o' rags, tied up, mightn't it?" Wade mused aloud. "Only sort o' flat and long, like?"

"Yeh—yeh, that's how it looked!" Yocum exclaimed, his troubled face brightening with sudden hope. "You seen it, huh? You know where it is?"

"Yes—and no," Jemcy drawled, enjoying the cringing rancher's suspense. "I reckon I saw it, all right, and I reckon I know about where it is—but it's goin' to be some job to find it."

"How—why—what'cha mean?" his visitor stammered.

"Well, I mean," Jemcy went on with deliberate leisure, "I was buckin' my hay up to the press. I noticed Mac, here—" indicating the Airdale that had taken to the shade under the rancher's rig—"playin' with some sort of a white roll o' rags tied up— He'd been chasin' squirrels up on your ridge, yonder."

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"Go on—what happened to it?" his caller gasped with an anguished look.

"That's what I was comin' to," Jemcy stated mildly. "He was playing on a hay shock when I came along with the buck. When he felt things movin', he dropped what he had in his mouth and ki-yied outa the way. I reckon the buck jest picked up your money with the hay and took it on to the press."

"You—you think it wasn't found by none o' them hay balers?" the distressed rancher quavered.

"Not a chance," Jemcy replied. "They was hoppin' right to it, them balers. And that was the last buck load before noon. By the time I got my team unhooked, they had it all baled. They wasn't none o' them stoppin' to pick rags. Hay balers are paid by the ton, Ira. They don't bother to sort out a few clods, sticks and such trash that gets mixed up with the hay."

FOR a moment, Ira Yocum appeared to be greatly relieved, then his expression took on a shade of new worry. "It'll be a job to go through all them bales," he commented, "unless we should find it after the first few."

"That's what I was tellin' you," the young homesteader agreed.

"Say!" his visitor suddenly demanded, "what was yore idee in balin' all that rotten hay, anyhow?"

"I've been hopin' to sell it," said Jemcy.

Yocum stared and his jaw sagged, then a dawning flash of suspicion showed in his narrowed eyes. He seemed to choke. "What's yore price?" he demanded. "I'll pay you by the bale, as I go through it."

"The whole crop is for sale," Wade returned with a slow smile. "They's eighty tons, by the baler's weights. I've got 'em all down on paper. They'd 'a' been more if it hadn't lost weight by dryin' out the second time. And your cattle cut it down some, that time they broke in.

"To make up the shortage, I'll have to get thirty dollars a ton for what's left. I want it hauled outa the field, too. I don't want it to lay around and spoil. Get me? Cash down before it's moved, Mr. Yocum. Twenty-four hundred dollars even money. O' course," he ended with mocking unconcern, "if I can't sell it, I'll have to burn it, to git it out o' the way—"

"You'll burn a dang sight hotter, afore I pay that!" squealed the frothing rancher.

"All right," Jemcy returned, untroubled. "It's my hay. And don't forget—it's all wired up!"

"How could I pay it, till I get my money out?" Yocum whined, suddenly wilting into the buggy seat. There was a beaten, wavering expression in his squinted eyes.

"That would be too bad," Jemcy sympathized. "Accidents will happen when a feller's broke. Maybe you could borrow it on your ranch."

He shrugged and started to turn away. "It's hot, here in the sun."

"All right—all right!" the other croaked, his face contorting with helpless rage. "I keep runnin' expenses in the bank. I guess I've got that much—"

Trembling, he drew a check book and indelible pencil from the inside pocket of his vest.

"You can start haulin'," Jemcy remarked as he took the slip of paper from the buyer's shaking hand, "but not till I've cashed this. And when you break open them bales, you can save the hay wire!"

THE END.

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The Golden Serpent

By FRED MacISAAC
Author of "The King Who Came Back," "Pirate of Wall Street," etc.

Whether his tin mines were worth a fortune or nothing, Pat Carney swore that no Bolivian band of crooks would steal them

"I am waiting for you to sign," said the planter

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

FROM his Irish father, Patrick Paul Carney inherited fifty thousand dollars and some tin mines in South America. Pat's guardian, Roger Martin, told him that the Chalitas Mines were played out. But Pat was skeptical.

After he had spent a few days in La Paz, capital of Bolivia, Pat felt sure that the mines were still rich. It looked instead as though Blossom, who was the mine superintendent, and a man named Geoffry Foster wanted to deceive Pat's old guardian into selling the mines for next to nothing. There was also a wealthy planter in the deal, Señor Pedro Quecheta; and a grasping agent for a British corporation, Cecil Scroggins.

Fortunately Pat had the support of the government. Chivalrously he had defended an old general from assassins, to learn later that he had saved President Hernandez of Bolivia. The grateful official had advised Pat not to sell the mines, and had ordered his secret service department to guard the American.

But tin mines meant no more to Pat than did Rosita Montajo, a lovely and bewildering girl whom he had first seen in a New York night club. There was some strange bond between them; for each owned a golden jewel carved like a serpent, a token which the Aymara Indians for some reason held in great awe. Pat had inherited the jewel from his mother, a Bolivian.

Since his arrival in La Paz, he had called on Rosita once, and the visit was

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shrouded in mystery. He had been drugged in her motor car on the way, and again when he returned, so he did not learn where she lived. During his visit Rosita—or "Thal" as she had called herself—wore a brilliant robe of feathers, and performed a sort of ritual. When he woke up in his hotel, Pat found a serpent tattooed in bright-colored ink on his hip.

A friend of his, a rotund mining engineer known as Tiny Tolliver who had been stranded in La Paz for a long time, declared Rosita must be a pure-blooded Aymara Indian, possibly a priestess. Among the Indians, the name Thal was one of great terror, and meant "Queen of Hell." Tiny thought the golden serpent brotherhood might have some connection with an ancient Aymara plot—to tunnel into Lake Titicaca and flood La Paz, city of the hated white race.

Tiny and Pat knew that Rosita had used the President's motor car, but they did not know that she was the President's adopted daughter. Yet she really was a pure-blooded Aymara, and seemed to lead two different lives.

It was when Pat went to dinner at the British Club with his English friends Reggie and Madge Barton that he met Geoffry Foster, who offered him ten thousand pounds for the Chalitas Mines. Pat haughtily rejected the offer, which he thought was insultingly small.

CHAPTER XVI.

SURPRISED BY THE ENEMY.

WHEN conversation became general after dinner Pat Carney had time to ponder over his interview with Foster. It looked to him as though a deal had been framed between his crooked manager Blossom and the Scroggins-Foster combination, which had been spoiled by his appearance upon the scene.

They had counted upon the inertia of Carney's guardian in New York, who had already accepted the advice of Blossom to close down the mine, and had calculated that the indifferent Roger Martin would cable Blossom upon receipt of an offer and accept it when informed that it was the best that could be done.

They had not counted upon the termination of the guardianship and the journey of the young owner to Bolivia. Quecheta, of whom Scroggins spoke so highly, was certainly in the plot, and the crooks, upon learning that Carney was coming to upset the apple cart, had arranged to have him taken from the express train and murdered by Aymara bandits. That failing, they had made him their best offer, and his refusal would probably result in further attempts upon his life.

If Carney died suddenly, his property would go to distant cousins. They would consult with Roger Martin, and no doubt be advised to sell the mines at a low figure.

It never occurred to the young man to doubt that he would beat them. Nor did he doubt that he would capture that little wild cat, Thal, and tame her. He expected to marry the woman he loved and make millions from his mines, and he went home with the Bartons in an exalted mood for which Madge Barton flattered herself that her company was responsible.

AS soon as he had said good night to his English friends, he went directly to his room, undressed and retired and fell asleep in ten minutes. Immediately he began to enjoy a de-

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lightful dream, the salient features of which were a magnificent residence at Southampton in which he was living with his adorable Bolivian bride, and he resented it fiercely when a harsh voice said:

"Wake up!"

He clung to his dream until he was violently shaken and then he became aware that a hard round object was jammed against his forehead and a light was blinding him.

The object was the muzzle of a revolver, and the light came from a flash lamp which was being held by the person who had shaken him.

"Wha—wha—what's the meaning of this?" he demanded, more angry than frightened because he was not fully awake.

"You will dress yourself, *señor,* and acompany me," said the voice in Spanish.

Having become accustomed to the light, Carney was now aware that there were two men in his room and both were armed.

"What do you want? Why should I go with you? I refuse."

"Our instructions, *señor,* are to shoot you if you refuse to obey orders," said the man with the gun and the flash light.

"What happens if I go with you?"

"You will be interviewed by an important personage and, if all goes well, will be escorted back to this room."

"Well," he said reluctantly. "Turn on a light and I'll go with you."

The second man turned the switch beside the door and the room was lighted. Carney saw two well-built, determined-looking men in citizen's clothes, Castilians both of them; men with straight backs and erect heads like soldiers.

It was possible that the rather eccentric President of the republic had taken this method of fetching him to an audience, and it was more probable that he was in the hands of enemies. In view of their appearance and their weapons, he was not in a position to resist them. Sullenly he donned his clothes, putting on a morning suit instead of the evening wear he had so recently removed. He dressed as leisurely as possible, but his captors did not appear to be pressed for time for they made no remonstrance.

"I'm ready," he said at length.

They unlocked the door and led the way along the balcony outside, not toward the stairway which went down to the hotel lobby, but in the opposite direction. Presently they descended a narrow service stairway at the rear of the building and went out through a rear door into a narrow street where a carriage was awaiting them.

They commanded that Carney sit between them, and the vehicle immediately started, the hoofs of the horses making a great clatter upon the round, flinty paving stones. The men had pulled a robe over the American and themselves, which enabled them to keep their weapons in hand though covered by the robe from the gaze of persons on the streets. Though it was a little after midnight there were still pedestrians, occasionally they met another carriage, and once a motor car bumped past, making heavy weather upon the uneven pavements. It was quite chilly.

Pat attempted to obtain information from his guards, but they refused to reply to his questions. When they approached a policeman he considered making an appeal, but decided against it. The officer did not look formidable and the men in the cariage with him looked quite capable of murdering him.

After ten minutes of jolting along

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they reached a region of dark streets and swung upon a better road which ran parallel to the river. Pat was making notes of their direction, but at this point one of his captors proceeded to bandage his eyes with a white silk muffler. Five or six minutes after that, the character of the racket made by the hoofs of the horses changed, and he judged they were crossing a stone bridge over the river.

The carriage turned right on the other side and after some minutes began to climb. Evidently it was a very steep incline, for the vehicle moved very slowly. To Pat, blinded as he was, seconds dragged into minutes and an interminable time seemed to have elapsed before he recognized that the animals were tramping upon a macadam road. Immediately afterward they came to a stop.

"We descend here, *señor*," said one of his guards. "Permit me to assist you."

He helped Carney out of the carriage, walked with him a few rods and said, "Four steps here, *señor*."

After that a door opened, he was led across a hall and into a brightly lighted room. The bandage was snatched from his eyes and he was unable to see clearly for a few seconds. Then he discovered that he was in a well-furnished drawing room and that Don Pedro Quecheta was standing opposite him with a satirical smile upon his face.

"YOU are welcome, Señor Patrick Carney," said the ranchman politely.

Pat did not return his smile.

"Are you responsible for this outrage?" he demanded.

Quecheta spread out his hands in an expansive gesture.

"I regret the necessity," he replied. "It was of great importance that you and I have a talk, *señor*."

"Then why not call me at my hotel? I refuse to talk to you, sir."

"Please be seated. A glass of wine? A highball?"

"No, thank you."

"At least you will sit down. Gentlemen, you may retire."

Pat shrugged his shoulders and seated himself.

"I wonder if you will satisfy my curiosity, *señor?*" said Quecheta cajolingly. "I was talking to-day with a government official who told me of your experience with bandits who stopped the coast express and carried you off. Never before have I heard of a man escaping from the hands of those rascals. How did you get away from them?"

"Did you drag me out of bed at the point of a gun to hear my story?" asked Carney angrily.

"That was not my main reason. However, if you do not mind telling me."

Pat looked him in the eye. "Their watch on me was slack. I stole a horse and rode away. They pursued me, but I evaded them and finally came to a railroad station, where I boarded a train for La Paz."

"Most remarkable. I compliment you. The Aymara bandits can track a man as well as your North American Indians, and you must be clever."

"Say luck, and let it go at that."

Knowing that Quecheta had hired the Aymaras to carry him off and murder him, he marveled at the fellow's sublime impudence.

"Your prospects of being rescued by the government troops were very slight," Quecheta added. "The detachment sent after you returned without discovering a trace of your captors."

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"I admit I was lucky."

"But this is a curious thing," added Quecheta. "I learned to-day that rural police came upon a village whose inhabitants were suspected of being bandits and found every man, woman and child in the place lying dead with their throats cut from ear to ear. Surely you did not slay the entire band when you escaped?" asked Quecheta.

"Women and children, too?" asked Carney, horrified to hear conviction of what Thal had told him.

Quecheta nodded. "Then you were taken as far as the village?"

"I—I escaped after I reached the village. When they were all asleep."

"It is very queer," remarked Quecheta, as much to himself as to the American.

PAT was almost ill. While the Aymaras were horrible, degenerate wretches, their wholesale massacre was too dreadful to contemplate. He had not supposed that the women or children would be harmed. Could it be that the beautiful young Thal was responsible for this appalling slaughter? He didn't want to believe that. And yet she had spoken as though she had ordered it.

"You are pale, *señor*," remarked Quecheta.

"I—I'm all right," he replied. "What do you want of me, anyway?"

"Ah, yes. To business. Early this evening you refused an offer for the Chalitas tin mines. You were foolish to do that, *señor*."

"That's my business, sir."

"And mine," replied Quecheta. "I brought you here to persuade you to accept five thousand pounds for a clear title."

"I refused ten thousand," said Pat contemptuously.

"Ah, but Señor Foster was not justified in making you such an offer! He failed to consult with those who were associated with his company in the affair. Five thousand pounds, *señor*. I have the cash here, and I have a bill of sale ready for your signature."

"Permit me to inform you that I am not selling my father's mines."

"It is not a question of your wishes, *señor*. You will sign, or—"

Pat reared his head.

"Or what?" he flashed.

"Or you will not leave this place alive."

Pat's answer was a reckless laugh.

"You do not seem to be aware of your situation, *mio amigo*," said Quecheta brusquely. "Your death will make it a simple matter for those who wish Las Chalitas to acquire them. Your visit to La Paz was a grave error, *señor*. You retired to-night at your hotel, but rose and left secretly to keep an assignation. Your body will be found in the river, a knife between your shoulder blades. It is thus that *cholo* husbands avenge themselves upon lovers of their women. No suspicion can possibly attach to me, Señor Carney. I mention this to make it evident that you have no choice but to sign this deed."

Pat crossed his knees, drew out his cigarette case and lighted a cigarette, after which he blew a puff of smoke toward Quecheta. He was badly frightened, but he did not show it.

"It seems that you are an assassin," he sneered.

Quecheta scowled. "I hope it won't be necessary to resort to extreme measures."

"Oh, yes, it will," replied Carney, with forced cheerfulness. "I am not selling the mines for less than a million dollars."

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Quecheta drew a revolver from his pocket and aimed it at the American. "No more words," he snarled. "Step over to this desk and sign or I'll shoot you in your tracks."

"But that is not getting my signature," Pat replied softly.

"I have explained that your death is as good as your signature. Before I count three. One—two—"

"Oh, well," said Carney with a forced laugh, "I can't resist your argument."

HE rose and moved toward the ornate writing table on the opposite side of the room. Quecheta, gun ready, accompanied him. He spread out the legal document on the table and pointed with his left hand.

"Sign there, *señor,* and there," he commanded.

Pat picked up a quill pen and dipped it in the ink bottle.

"There is no ink in this bottle," he complained.

"But yes," contradicted Quecheta, who stooped to see for himself.

Pat lifted the ink bottle as though to show him, and deftly dashed the contents in his face, at the same time tipping the table over on Quecheta. Leaping up, he grasped the revolver and endeavored to tear it from the man's hand.

The Spaniard emitted a roar of rage and pain, for he was blinded by the ink, but he held onto his weapon. Carney kicked him viciously in the shin, and the big man went over backward, Carney on top. As they fell the revolver went off, but the bullet penetrated the ceiling.

Quecheta was strong as a bull, and Carney quickly realized he was no match for him; but the young man was in a red rage and fought like a wild cat, pummelling his enemy in the face with his left hand and managing to keep the revolver harmless with his right.

Had the battle continued, there was little doubt that Quecheta would have overpowered the smaller man eventually, but the revolver shot drew into the room the pair who had brought Carney from the hotel. They fell upon the American, dragged him off the Bolivian and stood him on his feet, his arms pinioned behind him.

Quecheta rose, still half blind, and wiped the ink from his eyes with his sleeve. Then he measured Carney and struck him a terrific blow upon the side of the head with his clenched fist.

The man was a very powerful fellow and, had he known how to get all his weight behind his blow, he would most likely have killed the helpless American. As it was, he knocked him senseless.

Pat's weight fell upon his captors, who ruthlessly dropped him. Quecheta drew back his riding boot and slammed it twice into the ribs of the unconscious young man.

"Yankee swine!" he roared. "I'll kill him for that, but not yet."

"Has he signed, *señor?*"

"No, but he will. Take him down and lock him in the empty wine cellar. Put Pancho and Diego on guard down there."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HUNGER METHOD.

SOME time later Pat came back to life. He was lying flat on his back on a cold stone floor. His head ached frightfully and there was a sharp pain in his chest. He touched it gingerly and the pain doubled. He seemed to

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have a broken rib and he did not know how he had received it.

He lay there for several minutes in a semi-stupor. Gradually everything cleared, and he remembered what had happened. They hadn't shot him, as Quecheta had threatened. That meant that they preferred to have his own signature to dealing with his heirs.

Very likely they wanted to enter upon possession of the mines at once, since his death would cause them a long delay before they could get action from the probate court in New York eight or nine thousand miles away. Most likely they were already in possession of the mines and wanted their position legalized in a hurry. Once he had signed the deed his life would not be worth a red cent, because they would not risk his appearing in the Bolivian courts to claim that his signature was obtained by duress.

He became aware of voices and, looking up, observed that there was a square opening in the door of his prison, heavily grilled. Painfully he got upon his feet, moved to the grille.

Upon the opposite side of a large vaulted basement two servants sat on the floor, and by the light of a single candle were throwing a pair of dice.

He inspected his prison as well as he could in the darkness and found that it was a room about fifteen feet square, with no window. The only exit was the heavy door containing the grille. Carney sat down upon the floor again and felt very badly. His side hurt, his head pained and he did not know how he could possibly escape from this tangle.

That Quecheta was cruel, ruthless and crafty he knew from experience. He realized perfectly well that the hotel people would assume he had set forth upon some amorette, and when he failed to return would suppose that he had been caught by some native husband and knifed. His body in the river would confirm that opinion. Tiny Tollivar would suspect that some of his enemies had dragged him to his death, but Tiny's suspicions would do Carney no good when he was a corpse.

And Thal would think— Thal! That brought back the horrible fear that the woman he loved had caused the massacre of the miserable inhabitants of the Aymara village. She had informed him that his assailants already had perished. When he asked her if the soldiers had killed them, she had answered, evasively, that there was no longer a living person in the accursed village. Well, how could Thal have found the village and ordered such a massacre, so quickly? Of course she had nothing to do with it!

"HOW do you do, *señor?*" said a familiar voice.

He glanced at the grille and saw Quecheta peering in at him.

"You go to hell!" he snarled. "I'd like to finish that fight. If I had had you alone I would have strangled you."

"You treacherous hound!" retorted the Bolivian. "For half an hour I could not see out of one of my eyes."

"Sorry I didn't close them both forever," Carney replied defiantly.

"I am of a forgiving nature, *señor,*" Quecheta said softly. "Are you ready to sign?"

"No."

"Ah, well, we have much time before us. In a day or a week, it will be just the same. You will sign eventually. Do you know why, *señor?*"

Pat scorned to make a reply.

"Because, until you sell me Las Chalitas, you will neither eat nor drink."

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"Will you do me a great favor, *señor?*" asked Pat sweetly.

"For example?"

"Take your ugly face away from that grille."

"When next you see me, it will be because you have sent for me," the Bolivian replied with a nasty laugh.

After he had gone, Pat lay down upon the hard stone floor and presently, despite his pains and aches, he slept the sleep of exhaustion.

He must have slept six or seven hours, because when he awoke it was daylight. White light streamed through several windows set high in the wall of the basement opposite, and some of it penetrated into the unused wine cellar where the American lay a prisoner.

His rib still pained him, but his head did not ache any longer and he rose, walked to the grille and looked into the basement. Under one of the windows a servant was eating bread and cheese, drinking red wine, and evidently enjoying his repast. He pricked up his ears at the footsteps of the American, and turning his head saw Carney looking at him through the grille. He made a gesture of contempt and continued the business of eating.

Pat became aware that he was ravenous and remembered Quecheta's threat that he would be starved into selling the mines. And when, weakened by hunger and thirst, he did sign, he would be signing his death warrant. Death either way, but starvation was the most horrible.

However, thinking about it made him almost shriek for food and drink. His throat became parched and his tongue seemed to swell as he watched the servant guzzle his wine. The man was an Aymara Indian, an ugly, surly-looking brute. As he stared at him, desperation gave him inspiration.

"*Ola!*" he called.

The native grinned derisively at him. Pat showed him a bank note. Fortunately it had not occurred to Quecheta to rob him.

"Not for all the wealth in the bank of Bolivia would I let you out," replied the man. "I would be flayed alive."

"I shall give you this for some wine and bread."

"I dare not, *señor*. You are not to be fed."

"I will give it to you if you will come here and let me show you something."

"Ah," said the Aymara, "that is different!"

He rose and approached the grille. Pat pulled up his shirt and released his belt, revealing his hip.

"Gaze upon this," he cried in a voice which was unsteady, for this was a forlorn hope.

The Indian looked through the bars. His eye fell upon the winged serpent tattooed in blood-red ink upon the hip of the American. His mouth opened and closed and a sibilant hiss escaped as he pushed out his breath.

"Prince!" he exclaimed. "How can I be of service?"

Glory be, it had worked again!

"Wine and food, first."

"Immediately, great one."

He vanished, and Carney put his clothing in order. It was evident that Tiny Tolliver had been correct in his conjectures. There was, among the Aymara Indians, some secret organization of which the wearers or bearers of the winged serpent were chiefs. Thal was its commander in chief.

IN a few minutes the Indian returned with half a loaf of bread, a wedge of cheese and a flagon of red wine. "Consume it quickly," he implored. "Call me, when you are through."

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Carney ate and drank rapidly and summoned his jailer who, suddenly, had become his slave.

"Now get me out of here," he commanded.

The man turned pale. "Impossible, lord. You do not know Señor Quecheta."

With a fine assumption of rage, Carney thrust his arm through the grille and struck the Aymara lightly in the face.

"Do you dare refuse to obey me?" he exclaimed.

The Indian fell upon the floor and flattened.

"No, no, prince!" he whimpered. "I will do what I can."

"Then open at once."

The Aymara lifted up his hands. "Mercy, lord!" he pleaded. "In the day, it will be impossible for you to escape. Deign to remain a prisoner until to-night. To-night, I shall bring Diego, who is of the brotherhood and who watches with me. You will show him the sign and we shall conduct you to safety. But you will have pity on us, for Quecheta will kill us if we return."

"I shall give you much money. Don't be afraid. I will protect you. And for lunch I want meat and sweet wine. The red wine is sour."

"*Sí, sí,* lord!" cried the Aymara, eagerly.

"And remember, if I do not escape to-night, the wrath of Thal will be upon you."

The Aymara threw himself again on the floor and whined like a whipped dog.

"Not that, not that!" he implored. "Surely it shall be well, to-night, *señor!*"

"Go now," commanded Carney. "I want to be alone."

He had made use of Thal's name to see if it would have any effect upon the native, and it had terrified him. Thal, evidently, was an object of great terror. He had already heard her called the Queen of Hell.

Rosita Montajo had told him that her name was Thal, but that was nonsense. That young, lovely creature couldn't be the evil divinity of the Aymaras! She had used the name for its effect on her sweetheart, just as she had put on the feather dress and received him in a barbarically magnificent chamber. A child in masquerade. The darling was showing off.

Only, there were the matters of the massacre of the Aymara bandits and the blood-red tattoo which turned jailers into his humble servants.

Well, whatever the purpose of placing the winged serpent indelibly upon his flesh, it looked as though it were going to save his life. For the second time the serpent would defeat the purposes of Don Pedro Quecheta.

He grew very impatient as the day waned, and was glad to see the man who presented himself, one of the pair who had invaded his hotel chamber.

"Señor Carney," asked this person, showing his face at the grille, "are you ready to accept the proposal of Señor Quecheta?"

Pat grinned at him good-naturedly.

"Go back and tell the big stiff that I'm not hungry and thirsty enough to talk to him," he replied.

AT eleven o'clock that night Don Pedro Quecheta sat in his salon before a round table. Three men were with him and they were playing bridge. A magnum of champagne reposed near the knee of the planter. Beside each elbow was a glass of wine and they were on their second rubber.

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A servant rushed into the room, greatly excited, and made agitated signs at Don Pedro.

"*Señor!*" he exclaimed. "The soldiers!"

At the same instant the butt of a rifle thumped loudly upon the heavy oak of the front door. Quecheta pushed back his chair and the color drained from his face.

"Arrested!" he exclaimed. "He can't do this! He dare not do this!"

"What shall I do?" asked the terrified servant.

Don Pedro stood up and folded his arms dramatically.

"Open," he commanded. "It seems that Hernandez has turned despot."

There filed into the room a smart young captain, followed by half a dozen well-trained young Indians wearing the national army uniform. He saluted and Quecheta bowed gravely.

"The meaning of this intrusion?" the planter asked harshly.

"A thousand pardons, *señor*. I am here at the command of the President, with orders to search your house."

"And why, captain?"

"We have reason to believe that the American, Patrick Carney, is held here."

"And what makes you think that, captain?"

"It is reported that he was escorted from his hotel at midnight last night by two men who brought him here in a carriage. He has not returned, which indicates that he is still here."

Quecheta and his friends exchanged alarmed glances.

"You have no right to search my house," he replied. "The man you seek is not here and has not been here."

From his breast pocket the captain produced a paper.

"I have a presidential order of search. My men surround the house. They will shoot at an attempt to resist."

Quecheta shrugged his big shoulders and resumed his chair. "I do not resist a presidential order," he stated. "My servant shall show you around. Gentlemen, shall we continue our game?"

The officer's black eyes sparkled with admiration for the man's coolness. He saluted and snapped out an order. He and his soldiers followed the servant out of the room.

"YOU should have got rid of the damned American last night," said one of the card players.

"I thought him alone and friendless," said Quecheta thoughtfully. "It appears that he is under the protection of Hernandez. The old fox must have had him under surveillance and a cursed secret service man followed him here. Well, it is fate."

"And what will happen?"

Quecheta shrugged. "I will be accused of kidnaping an American citizen for ransom and thrown into prison, perhaps shot. Nothing would please Hernandez better than to convict me of a crime. I regret, gentlemen, involving you in this. I shall attempt to take the whole responsibility and endeavor to get you off . . . I bid three spades."

While they played they could hear the tramp of the heavy boots of the soldiers in different parts of the house and finally their descent into the basement. Following the example of their leader the three men affected to be absorbed in their game.

Fifteen minutes elapsed and then the captain entered alone.

"I regret, Don Pedro, to have inconvenienced you," he said pleasantly.

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"Not at all. You have, of course, found the man you sought?"

The officer laughed. "The *señor* is pleased to jest," he said. "Of course we have not found him. He is not here."

He saluted and departed without observing the stupefaction upon the faces of the four card players.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION.

THE great hall in the Palace of Government in the Plaza Murillo was brilliantly decorated. Flags of all nations were displayed, but the red, yellow and green of Bolivia predominated. Military officers who had shed their drab service uniforms for gorgeous dress uniforms augmented the spectacle, while the lovely women of aristocratic La Paz, in smart Parisian toilettes, lent charm to the scene. A military band in the plaza entertained the common people who had assembled by the thousands to hear the music and watch the arrival of the guests at the State Ball while, in the splendid salon, an excellent string orchestra struggled gallantly with the intricacies of the latest American dance music.

The President's guests were the members of the Congress and their ladies, the officers of the little standing army, their wives, and the leading citizens of the city.

Upon such an occasion it was impossible for the affair to be exclusive, since many of the members of Congress and of the officers of the army were *cholos,* and there were present a few full-blooded Indians, civilized of course, who represented one hundred per cent native districts. Fortunately for the comfort of the Castilian ladies present, few of the Indians had brought their wives.

The orchestra was stationed in a balcony at the far end of the hall beneath which was a canopy under which stood President Hernandez and the *señora* with his adopted daughter Rosita Montajo, whose marvelous gown of black satin represented the last breath of Parisian fashion.

Invitations had been issued for ten o'clock. There would be a reception lasting until eleven, dancing until two, supper, and dancing until four in the morning.

Carney arrived with the Bartons, who had been sent invitations through the influence of Mr. Scroggins. As there were not nearly enough vehicles in the city to transport all the guests, the trio had walked the few blocks from the hotel to the palace and run the gantlet of thousands of pairs of curious black eyes belonging to the common folks. These, however, had made way respectfully for the foreigners as they crossed the plaza, although they commented loudly upon the golden hair and blond beauty of Madge Barton under the assumption that the aliens would not understand them. Carney embarrassed the girl greatly by translating some of the compliments for her benefit.

"That woman says you look like the mother of God," he said.

"All the madonnas I ever saw were dark," she objected.

"Anyhow, you are very beautiful."

"Considering your fondness for brunettes, I consider that a real compliment," she replied with a smile.

Carney's face lengthened. Three days had elapsed since he had been led to safety by the brethren of the winged serpent, and his inquiries regarding Thal had profited him not at all.

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Still, he had to admit that his enthusiasm for Thal had been dampened, and he had been seeing a lot of Madge Barton during the past three days. She was wholesome, gentle and fun-loving, and in her evening dress of white satin, she was adorable. Madge had a figure which was exquisite, though it lacked the sinuous allure of that of Thal. And Madge liked him. She made it evident.

To-morrow he and Tiny were starting off for a personal inspection of Las Chalitas Mines. The eagerness of Quecheta and Foster to purchase them made it evident to Carney that they were far from being worked out. Tiny had engaged a tin expert whom he could trust, and they were taking an armed escort of a dozen men.

THEY presented their cards of admission to the cavalry captain who stood at the entrance to the palace inspecting those who entered, and were turned over to a flunky who led them to the cloak rooms. The two men waited patiently while Madge added touches to a flawless complexion, and when she joined them, a resplendent army officer asked their names and conducted them toward the receiving line.

Madge exclaimed with admiration at the beauty of the ladies, and the perfection of their toilettes.

"One might be in London or New York!" she murmured. "And to think of people like these living in this half-barbaric little city! It's a paradox—Ouch!"

Carney, whose right hand was guiding her by means of her left forearm, had tightened involuntarily and hurt her.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered.

She glanced at him and saw that he was staring at the receiving line, where he saw the old gentleman whom he had rescued in the park. Beside him stood the goddess of the night club, arrayed as he had first seen her, radiant, shining, weirdly and exotically lovely.

To his impatience their guide stopped them while several other groups of guests were introduced, and while he stood there she met his eye. Her lips parted in a divine smile.

"Is that—is she—your inamorata?" asked Madge, but he was too far away mentally to hear her.

The English girl's lower lip quivered and she stared at the girl in the black satin gown with hostile eyes. However, she was too good a sport to disparage her successful rival.

"She is very beautiful," she murmured. "And like no other woman I ever saw."

"Presenting Señorita Madge Barton," said their escort, who had led them to their host. "And Señor Reginald Barton and Señor Patrick Paul Carney."

The President grasped the hand of each in turn.

"Señora Hernandez," he said, "and Señorita Montajo, my adopted daughter."

The President's eye gleamed in friendly recognition as he shook hands with Carney, but he passed him on like the others and finally Pat was touching the cool palm of Thal. Her face was without expression, her smile was perfunctory, but as he released her hand she said without lip movement.

"Come to me for the third dance."

AT once the three Anglo-Saxons moved on and were pounced upon by Scroggins, who grinned blandly at Carney as though he were not convicted in the American's mind as being a party to the affair at Que-

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cheta's. As the Bartons were neither aware of the narrow escape three nights ago nor of Scroggins's possible hand in it, they greeted him politely and chatted with him while Pat tried to penetrate the deepened mystery of Thal.

It appeared that she was the adopted daughter of the President and her name was Montajo. It confirmed the statement of the *cholo* that the black sedan without a license number was the property of the President, but it made more inexplicable her masquerade at the unknown house, the business of the drugs, the tattoo and the massacre of the Aymaras. How could she escape the rigid conventions of this Spanish country?

He gazed around at the ladies of La Paz. Pure Spanish type or mixed bloods. There was not a face in the room which faintly resembled that of Thal. There was no woman whose skin had that curious shade of ivory and the transparency of alabaster and none who held her head as regally.

After an interminable period the President lifted his hand and the orchestra burst into a fox trot. Hernandez led out a very fat woman of dark complexion, and a man in evening clothes conducted Rosita Montajo upon the floor.

Madge touched his arm.

"Aren't you going to ask me to dance?" she inquired reproachfully.

"Of course," he replied, coming out of his trance.

"The President's daughter," commented Madge. "Well, you fly high, my friend. I suppose you are very happy. I heard her promise you the third dance."

"Eh?"

"If you won't talk to me, let's go back to my brother."

"I beg your pardon," he said contritely. "Isn't she marvelous?"

"And a little terrifying. There is something very strange about that girl. If you marry her, you had better not make her jealous."

He laughed lightly, and at that moment Thal whirled into view, her eyes full upon them and shooting forked lightning.

He smiled ardently at her, but she lifted her chin and turned her head away.

Pat's foolish heart soared. She was jealous. And when a man who loves a woman first recognizes jealousy in her, he is enchanted.

WHEN that dance was over, an officer led him to a much-powdered but young and pretty woman with fine eyes, introduced him, and he danced with her. She prattled inanely for ten minutes, and then Pat was free to go to Thal, who sat between her parents, almost invisible because of the circle of men about them.

She rose as he approached, and the courtiers made way for him at her gesture, and then the dance started.

"Who is that horrible blond woman?" she demanded fiercely as they moved into the dance.

"A casual acquaintance, *señorita,*" he said. "She is English. I came with her and her brother."

"She loves you," she said in a low tone. "I will not have it. You belong to me."

"Which suits me perfectly," he said joyfully. "You can imagine my astonishment when I found you here and was informed who you really are. I have been searching for you ever since that night."

"I do not wish you to search for

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me. I shall arrange it when I want to see you," she said coldly.

"But, Thal—"

"Hush! Never mention that name except when we are alone. I am Señorita Montajo."

"And, frankly, I like you better as Señorita Montajo. I have a bone to pick with you about that night. Why did you drug me? Why tattoo me?"

She smiled delightfully. "It was necessary—and the serpent has saved your life again."

"Oh, you know about that? Does the President know?"

"I know everything. He knows nothing."

"You are a strange girl," he marveled.

Her ripe lips were very close to his. "Do you love me?" she murmured. "Will you obey me blindly—follow where I lead? Strike where I tell you?"

"Yes!"

"And, as the serpent has twice saved your life, your life belongs to it."

"No, to you."

"That will suffice. Compose yourself, my friend. Your ardor is too noticeable."

"I'll try."

"Very well. Keep away from that blond woman. I don't want her arms around you."

"I don't take any interest in her."

"If you do, something appalling will happen to her," she said viciously. "Take me back to my father. The music has stopped."

"Don't go," pleaded Pat. "We must talk. Do you love me?"

"My red man!" she said softly. "My promised consort!"

In a fog he left her with the President and made his way to his friends. For him the ball was over. She had confirmed her affection for him, and it was too soon for him to analyze her rather curious expressions.

CHAPTER XIX.

"IT IS WAR!"

REGGIE and Madge were dancing. The polite army officer had neglected to find him a partner, and Carney was scanning the dancers for a glimpse of Rosita, when he felt a touch upon his arm, turned and found himself confronted by Don Pedro Quecheta.

The man was smiling at him pleasantly, but his eyes were not pleasant.

"Good evening, Señor Carney," he said politely.

Pat scowled at the impudent brute. "It is fortunate for you that consideration due my host prevents me from finishing what I started the other night," he said in a low, furious tone.

Quecheta bowed as though Carney had spoken to him courteously.

"The same situation prevents my retaliation," he said. "I trust we are both well-bred men."

"I don't care to talk to you. I will settle with you at another time."

"As you please, *señor*. I merely wish to thank you for rescuing me from a most embarrassing predicament."

"Eh? Say, I wouldn't rescue you—"

"My friend, you undoubtedly saved my life," asserted Quecheta.

"I don't know how, but I'm sorry to hear it."

"Would you mind satisfying a natural curiosity? How did you get out of that wine cellar?"

"Try to find out," said Pat insolently.

"I have tried and failed. Well, our

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worthy President has his faults, but ingratitude is not one of them."

"Meaning what?"

Quecheta lowered his voice still more. "Since you saved him from assassination the other day in the park, he keeps his paternal eye on you."

Carney endeavored to look puzzled. "Saved him? I never saw him before this evening."

"Is it so? Then perhaps you will explain how it happened that his police followed you to my house and that he sent a platoon of cavalry to your rescue when you had not come forth in twenty-four hours."

This was astonishing news to Carney and his expression of surprise was unfeigned.

"Ah, you did not know it?" asked Quecheta.

"I did not and I doubt it very much."

Quecheta laughed. "There were you, dying in the wine cellar, and there was I playing at cards when the military intruded. You can imagine my dismay. And when they had searched the house and did not find you, my gratitude to you was touching, my friend."

Carney eyed him speculatively. The frankness of the fellow was suspicious. His game was to obtain from Pat some useful admission.

"I can, perhaps, explain," he said nastily. "Knowing you for a brutal and vicious criminal, no doubt the police have had you under surveillance and, finding that I had not emerged from your residence, they broke in and searched it."

"But I still cannot understand how you got out, *señor*. If I can lay my hands on a pair of treacherous servants I may discover the method."

"Would you kindly leave me? Your face is objectionable to me."

"Ah, you seek a quarrel! I fight in my own fashion, *señor*."

"A knife in the back," sneered the American.

Quecheta shrugged. "I am willing to make a truce. Ten thousand pounds, Señor Carney."

"Not for a million to you, Señor Quecheta."

Quecheta bared his teeth.

"Then it is war."

The planter bowed once more and turned his broad back to Carney who was controlling himself with difficulty. Madge, dancing with a Bolivian officer, whirled past and smiled at him archly. He returned the smile mechanically and moved to a corner where he found a vacant chair. He had a lot of things to think about.

WHILE he adored Thal, he felt a growing resentment at her possessiveness. It was nice to have her call him her red man, but that "consort" business was too thick. He was going to be her husband, whom she would have to love, honor and obey.

And then there was that nasty crack about Madge. Why, she had said that if he did not keep away from Madge, something appalling would happen to the English girl! Of course it was nothing but a jealous remark, but it bothered him. Thal had a streak of cruelty in her.

How the deuce had she found out about his escape from Quecheta's house? It seemed to prove that she really was one of the winged serpent Indians; and he could not see why a lovely civilized creature like her should be mixed up with coca-eating natives.

"I have a dance I'm not using, Pat," said a very pleasant voice.

"Of course, Madge," he replied, rising, and he led her out upon the floor.

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"I was watching you when you danced with Señorita Montajo," she said as they swung into step. "Is she jealous of me, Pat?"

"Don't be silly," he said in great embarrassment.

"Ah!" ejaculated Madge. "I've just met her eyes. She's dancing with a general. She looked at me furiously."

"Blond women aren't popular with South American ladies, I fancy."

"Oh, it was more than that. I'll make her jealous really."

She lifted her head and her soft red lips came so close to those of Carney that they almost touched. He drew back his head in sheer fright.

"For heaven's sake, Madge!" he protested. "People might think I kissed you!"

She laughed gayly. "Let them think what they like. However, I don't think she saw us."

Carney fervently hoped that she hadn't. He was afraid, for a moment, that Thal might do something to harm the merry English girl.

A few minutes later Reggie claimed his sister for a dance, and Pat wandered out onto one of the balconies for a smoke. He had just tossed his cigarette over the rail and turned to enter the ballroom when he all but ran into a portly individual with a pair of very magnificent handlebar mustaches. There was no chance of mistaking the man he had met at the Club Florida.

"Señor Schultz, I believe?" he stammered. "I believe we met at the Ritz in New York, when I returned the Señorita Montajo's gold pin."

The German looked at him coolly, without surprise; but answered politely:

"How do you do, Señor Carney?"

"You are not surprised to find me here?" asked Pat curiously.

"My dear Señor Carney," said Schultz, "I anticipated your visit to La Paz long before we—shall I say happened?—to meet in the night club."

Carney did not try to hide his bewilderment.

"Would you mind telling me how it is you know so much about me? I would appreciate it, *señor,* if you would explain who you are. Perhaps you are acting in connection with this winged serpent business?"

"I am not at liberty to say, *señor,*" was the answer. "Good night."

"Good night," said Pat listlessly.

When the next dance ended, an announcement was made that supper was served. With the Bartons, Carney passed into the supper room, ate South American lobster imported directly from the great island off the coast of Chili where Robinson Crusoe is supposed to have passed his period of hermitage, drank French champagne and returned to the ballroom. The presidential party did not appear again, and many of the guests began to leave. Carney was glad to depart with his friends. He had some thinking to do.

CHAPTER XX.

SMOKE ON THE HORIZON.

"DISMISS the party for the mine," Carney commanded, when Tiny Tolliver reported at eight next morning. "Something has come up. I'm going to hang around here for another week."

"I thought we were all set for the trip," protested Tiny. "What's the big idea?"

"Well, for one thing I saw Rosita last night at the State ball. Tiny, she is the adopted daughter of the President."

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Tolliver indulged in a whistle of astonishment.

"That explains the use of the presidential motor car. Did she explain everything?"

"Well, no. The mystery is deeper. She even knows how I escaped from the Quecheta wine cellar."

Tiny nodded. "I guess there is no doubt that this winged serpent society extends all through the native population. If they don't belong to it, the Indians all know about it and are thoroughly cowed. They've a system of secret intelligence and the leaders know everything that happens in this country. It looks to me as though your girl friend is high up in it, even if she is the President's daughter. Maybe the old boy is grand master. He's very popular with the natives."

"I don't think so. She said that he didn't know anything about my method of escape."

"Well," said Tiny, "you are in it plenty. This is twice you've put the servants of the serpent to work for you. Wonder if all the big-wigs have that tattoo mark on them? Ask your girl friend about that."

"I don't know when I'll see her again," Pat said gloomily. "I love that girl, Tiny, but she frightens me."

"You got your winged serpent from your mother. It can't be so bad. Either she or one of her parents was in the thing. Maybe membership is hereditary."

"I'm going to find out about the mines, marry Rosita and get away from this weird country."

"And I'll go with you," declared Tiny. "That is, if you'll provide transportation."

Pat laughed and tapped his big shoulder.

"You bet I will! I guess the quickest way to get it over with is to start for the mines as arranged."

Tiny's face lighted. "Great! We take a train north in half an hour. About fifty miles up we meet Dawson, the engineer, our escort and a lot of mules. Get ready."

LEAVING a note for the Bartons, Carney and his friend breakfasted in haste and were in their railway carriage five minutes before starting time. Two large bags contained their mountain climbing costumes into which they would change at the village of Iliani, fifty miles up the line.

As the electric engine pushed the little train up the side of the cliff, they gazed down and marveled at the amazing crater in which nearly all of civilized Bolivia had been located.

"There's been a town down there for at least a thousand years," declared Tiny. "Not a bad climate, either, considering that the bottom of that cañon is more than twelve thousand feet above sea level. Ah, rain! It's always raining on the plateau at this season."

The train had emerged upon the Altaplana, which stretched away like a vast inland sea of grayish green, flat, monotonous and drear. The sky was overcast and the drizzle had become a torrent.

"No use looking out at this landscape," remarked Tiny. "What do you say to double solitaire?"

He produced two packs of cards and they amused themselves for an hour and a half, when they descended at an apology for a village. It consisted of a score of adobe huts, a brick railroad station, a miserable mud church and a low, one-story shack marked "Hotel Iliani." They were still on the Altaplana, but in the background dark-blue mountains were visible.

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As they descended from the train a burly, bearded white man approached them with outstretched hand.

"This is Jack Dawson," said Tiny. "Jack, this is Pat Carney, the boss."

Dawson shook hands with Carney and they appraised each other. Dawson had clear brown eyes and an agreeable smile. He looked good to Pat.

"Everything is ready, sir," he said. "I've got some pretty good *cholos* who have had military service, and about a dozen Indians to take care of the mules. Had trouble getting enough mules. Plenty of llamas, but I prefer the pesky old mule for a mountain trail."

"Do you know where we are going?" asked Carney.

Dawson nodded. "Had a job at your mines about five years ago, but couldn't get along with Blossom."

"Then you know the mines!" cried Pat eagerly.

"Got an idea of them. Heard they had petered out. Rather surprised. They were supposed to be inexhaustible when I worked up there."

"Hear that, Tiny?" demanded Pat excitedly.

Tolliver grinned. "I've seen a lot of inexhaustible mines peter out in my time. Haven't you, Dawson?"

"Sure. You can't always tell by indications. Many a fine vein will pinch up and disappear."

"We'll get into proper clothes and be with you in half an hour," said Pat.

"You brought ponchos?" asked Dawson.

"You bet your life!" replied Tiny. "I'm no greenhorn."

THEY changed in a room at the little hotel. Pat emerged wearing thick canvas coat and knickers over two sets of woolen underwear, and his head was thrust through a poncho which was of wool with a rubber exterior. He and Tiny wore the broad hats of the country.

"We strike off to the northwest," said Dawson, who was similarly attired. "Our outfit is waiting in a stable back here."

They found a score of rough-looking men awaiting them, among whom Pat recognized the two former servants of Don Pedro Quecheta whom he had sent to the rendezvous to get them out of reach of their vengeful master.

There were eight *cholos,* who were armed with carbines, and who would ride behind the white men. The Indians would lead the laden mules. Pat smiled to observe that the jaws of the natives were moving like Americans who chew gum. They were chewing coca leaf, and if provided with a sufficient supply, would carry on for several days without food.

"Is it far?" asked Carney when he rode forth with Dawson on one side of him and Tiny on the other.

"Well, if you had an airplane you could get there in an hour and a half, but you wouldn't be able to land. It will take us about six days if we're lucky. I suppose Blossom knows of our expedition."

"I hope he doesn't," said Pat dryly. "We made every effort to conceal it from him."

"He'll find out. You can't prepare an expedition in a little city like La Paz without the word getting round. Tell a native not to talk and he thinks he has a secret which it's his duty to broadcast."

"Well, we'll make Mr. Blossom feel uncomfortable if he decides to follow us, eh, Tiny?"

"Don't like the guy," said Tolliver.

"By the way, Mr. Carney," remarked Dawson, "I understand quite a

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little of the native lingo. For some reason you made a big impression on them. They were positively cheerful when we got under way."

"Aren't they always?"

The engineers exchanged glances and laughed understandingly.

"The Aymaras are sullen, treacherous brutes who have to be watched all the time. They'll work for us if we pay them, but they hate us. I'm hanged if they're not singing!" He listened.

"What are they singing?" demanded Pat.

Dawson did not answer for a moment.

"They've got an epic poem among them that I've heard snatches of now and again when they didn't think anybody could understand them. It's about the return of some god or other who is going to drive out the Spaniards. Lot of drivel."

After several hours they reached the foothills of the east branch of the Andes and began to ascend a dimly defined trail. Night overtook them by the time they had climbed a thousand feet and they chose a level space for a camp. The natives directed by a *cholo* set briskly about erecting tents, a camp fire of charcoal wisely brought along by Dawson was set going and they had a chance to get warm.

"We're well above the vegetation line," said Dawson, "so we can't get any wood to burn. We have two mules loaded with charcoal, which ought to do us until we return. This is camping *de luxe,* Mr. Carney. I've often slept out in these mountains without a fire."

"How much higher do we go?" asked Carney.

"About three thousand feet. That's sixteen thousand feet above sea level, of course, and we'll see plenty of snow, though not as much as in the winter time."

"I understood there was a railroad up to the mine."

"It's not operating. It's a dizzy single-track spur, and while it would get us there quicker if it were running, it crosses a lot of gorges and would be impassable for mules and any human beings except Indians."

"We're following the old trail up to Las Chalitas," explained Tiny.

BEING greatly fatigued, Carney turned in early, slept deeply and was awakened at sunrise. All that day they climbed laboriously, winding around mountains, creeping along narrow ledges, going always upward. During this time they did not encounter a living person nor see a habitation of any sort, and the cold grew more intense and the scene more dreary.

On the fifth day they passed an abandoned silver mine, and about noon on the sixth day Dawson uttered an exclamation. He saw a wisp of smoke on the high side of a mountain far ahead, and as they watched, the smoke moved rapidly along.

"That's your railroad, Mr. Carney," he said dryly. "And it's in operation."

"But you said—"

"It's supposed not to be in operation—but that's an ore train going down the mountain."

"What on earth does it mean?"

"In another hour we'll know," replied the engineer. "I expect to see smoke from the chimneys of your smelters."

"That's why they were in such a hurry to buy you out!" exclaimed Tiny. "The mine never shut down at all. The dirty thieves have been working it all the time."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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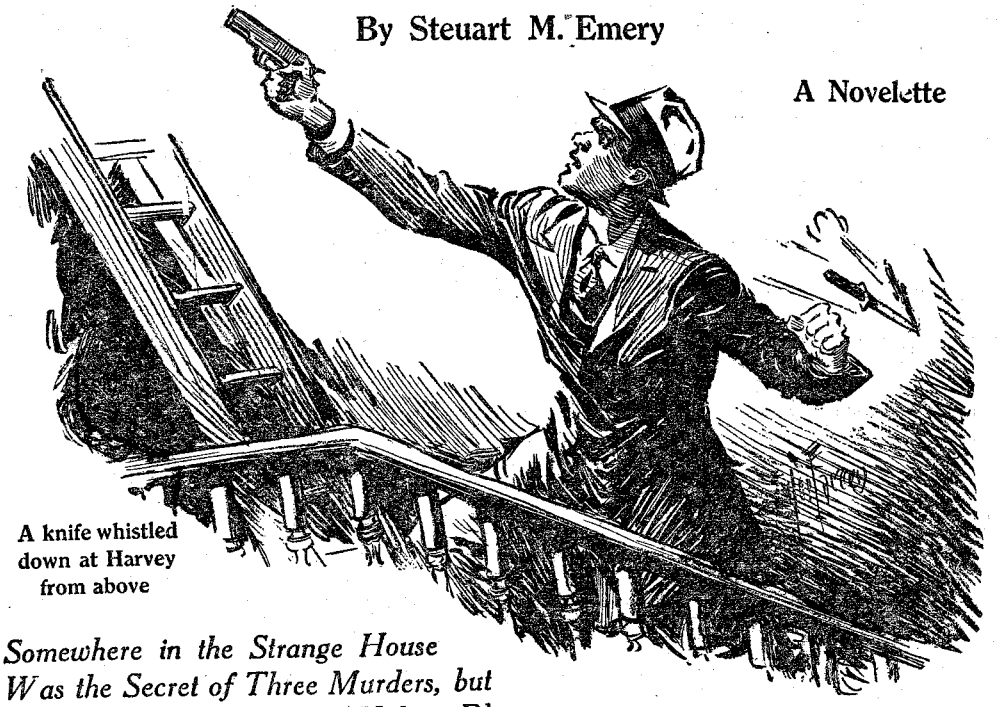
DO YOU READ DETECTIVE FICTION?

The Tiles of T'Sai Lu

By Steuart M. Emery

A Novelette



A knife whistled down at Harvey from above

Somewhere in the Strange House Was the Secret of Three Murders, but Death Itself Guarded the Hiding Place

CHAPTER I

The Open Door

THE butler's knock reverberated on the heavy steel door. Standing beside him, Detective Rick Harvey watched him cautiously. There was no answer from within the locked room. The butler turned toward Harvey, an ugly look in his eyes.

"He doesn't answer," he snarled. "There's something wrong."

He took a key from his pocket, fitted it to the lock, and opened the door. Then he stepped into the large, dimly lit room, Rick following.

"He—he isn't here!" the butler gasped.

But Rick had crossed to the other side of the room in a few long strides.

"Yes, he is," he said quietly.

The butler followed him, gave a gasp. Lying on a long couch was the body of a military-looking gentleman in a blue Chinese kimono. From his breast rose the straight, dark shaft of a javelin.

"God!" the butler gasped. "They got the colonel!"

Read this exciting novelette in next week's issue of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

Read DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—10c

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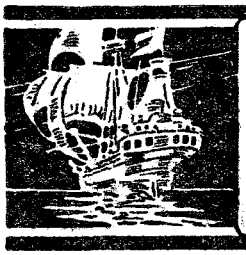

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

FOND of animal stories (and may we point out our new series of dog stories by John Stanford?):

Santa Barbara, Calif.

I am an ardent reader of the ARGOSY, and I read it from cover to cover, and I like all the clever stories. But the stories I like most are about animals, such as dogs and horses. I can't ever seem to get enough of those to read.

Have you a good wild horse mystery story? If you have, I and a great number of my friends in the city would greatly enjoy reading it in one of your future editions.

MRS. HATTIE SHEPARD.

A NEWSPAPER editor expresses his opinion:

Henryetta, Okla.

I like Grinstead, and am writing to compliment him on his latest, "Golden Derringers." I am one who read the initial number of the ARGOSY, back in the eighteen-eighties. It was called the *Golden Argosy of Poetry and Prose.*

GEORGE RILEY HALL,
Editor, *Daily Free-Lance.*

PRAISES Packard:

Huntington, W. Va.

I have just finished "The Gold Skull Murders," by Frank L. Packard, and it was one of the most interesting stories I have read. "Zorro Rides Again" was also a splendid story. I am reading "The King Who Came Back" and so far it is very good. How about another murder story or a *Peter the Brazen* story? They're my favorites.

MARY BURKHART.

BETTER in each field than the magazines that specialize in certain types:

New York, N. Y.

The stories in the ARGOSY are superior to any other magazine stories I have ever read. The Western stories are better than the Western story magazines. The fantastics, my favorites, better than other fantastic story magazines, etc.

At first it was quite hard to get my family interested in the magazine, but now I'm sorry that I've even showed it to them. They read it before I have a chance to look at it.

I would like to see Burroughs and Max Brand come back to the ARGOSY. Well, three cheers for ARGOSY.

HERBERT ARNOLD.

A DREAM of Madison Square Garden:

New York City.

I thought I'd let you read about the dream I enjoyed a few nights ago.

The scene is the Madison Square Garden, where the ARGOSY writers and their masterpieces are to go on parade before a large, enthusiastic audience of ARGOSY fans.

The first float is occupied by Otis Adelbert Kline who is conversing with the *Prince of Peril* who is seated next to *Maza of the Moon,* who, in turn, is conversing with *Jan of the Jungle.*

Then next comes A. Merritt seated on a pile of silk cushions with the *Snake Mother.* These two floats receive a loud burst of applause.

Suddenly I hear a sound like the flapping of wings and when I look up I behold *Tama, Princess of Mercury,* but a loud yell from the audience turns my attention to the floats again. There I see Fred MacIsaac seated next to the *Pirate of Wall Street.* In back of him a few occupants of "The Hothouse World" are gathered around a large cask of "Balata."

On the next float J. E. Grinstead seemed to be interested in a checker game on "The Devil's Checkerboard," with Jack Allman seated on "The Bell of the Lutine."

Peter the Brazen and *Susan O'Gilvie* listen attentively to Loring Brent's idea for his next story, on the following float.

Right after them comes George Worts and *Gillian Hazeltine* talking about the "Grapevine Murders."

The next float is the scene of a quarrel. *Jimmie Cordie* and his followers are receiving a strict reprimand from W. Wirt for shedding too much blood in their adventures.

In the following float F. V. W. Mason, "Captain Judas," some "Fetish Fighters," "The Tiger of Pnom Kha," and "The Living Juggernaut" are reposing and eying the audience.

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An exhibition of some fine fencing by the "Swordsmen of Florida" excites the fans.

Next I see "The Radio Pirates" exploring "Caves of Ocean," while immediately following *John Solomon* is exploring "Solomon's Caves."

And then last, but not least, *Bellow Bill* and *Bill* and *Jim* are singing an old-time tune that nearly ruined the whole performance.

The show is over. Every one leaves smiling.

PETER KOZACK.

JIMMIE CORDIE and *Tarzan* are paged:

Chicago, Ill.

This is my first sail on the good ship ARGOSY, and I think that they have a swell crew of authors. As soon as I get my ARGOSY I read "Argonotes." I hear people kicking about some of the stories, but I can't kick about any story.

When are you going to have a *Jimmie Cordie* story or a *Tarzan* story? Some of the best stories of the year are "He's My Meat!" "Naked Steel," "Red Twilight," "Whaling Blood," "Double Cross Ranch," "The Burning Road," "Gold Skull Murders," "Zorro Rides Again," "Escape!" "Twenty Wicked People" and about one hundred other stories. The best of all stories are Foreign Legion and Western stories.

GEORGE JAGER, JR.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

Fill out coupons from 10 consecutive issues and get a large ARGOSY drawing. This coupon not good after April 2, 1932.

1-9

Looking Ahead!

BLACK ICE

Gillian Hazeltine, lawyer-detective, fights a $50,000,000 murder frame-up. A mystery novel.

By GEORGE F. WORTS

THE SLEEP GAS

A subway train packed with the living dead rockets blindly beneath New York—the first blow of a scientific crime war. A novelette.

By MURRAY LEINSTER

THE KILLER OF KELANTAN

Marooned on a tropic ship with a rogue elephant!

A Novelette

By THEODORE ROSCOE

THE RODEO FIGHTER

A cowboy boxer with a secret weakness

A Short Story

By HERBERT L. McNARY

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—JAN. 16th

9 A—9

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